

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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BRITAIN AS RACIST AS EVER



FIGHT GLOBAL CAPITALISM

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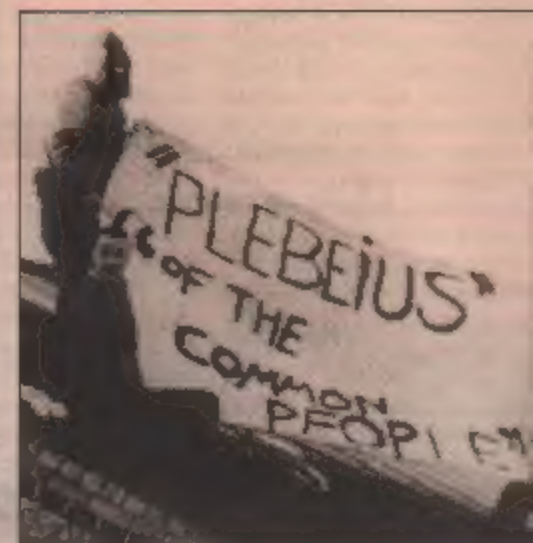
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London Mayor Election

'If voting changed anything, they'd abolish it'



Livingstone: 'there are no circumstances in which I would leave the Labour Party and run as an independent' - well, half right anyway!

able to overtake Livingstone with the help of the Milbank machine. None of this now looks likely, and the only consolation for Blair is that Livingstone can be expelled from the Labour Party.

These appear to be dramatic events in the context of a New Labour Party which has tightened control of its MPs and its members to the point of strangulation. The issue has been raised - should socialists vote for Ken Livingstone? For the socialist left who still have illusions in the Labour Party and its connections to the working class, this looks like the break they have been waiting for. On the surface, 'Red Ken' has broken with New Labour and will lead the opposition to Blair's right-wing social democratic programme. A Trotskyist coalition led by the Socialist Workers

Party, the London Socialist Alliance (LSA), has claimed Livingstone as its leader in the Mayoral election campaign, transforming this, in their heads at least, into the campaign for socialism in London. Harking back to the former 'glories' of the GLC, they are hoping that the mayoral election will bring a new dawn for the left of the Labour Party and for themselves. Great claims are made for Livingstone's GLC, including London-wide progressive education provision under the ILEA. The ILEA was, in fact, nothing to do with the GLC or Livingstone. The LSA's programme for London includes demands for a fully-financed NHS, a decent minimum wage, opposition to the sell-off of council houses and the abolition of student fees. Why not a General Strike and the formation of

Soviets? one asks. It is all fantasy. Livingstone's break with Labour is organisational not political. He has made it clear that he is not standing on a socialist programme and has been quick to dissociate himself from any socialist support. He has proclaimed his loyalty to New Labour, urged his supporters to stay in the Party and to put Dobson as second preference in the ballot. It is clear that, if he wins, his first campaign will be for reinstatement as a loyal Labour Party member. Under these circumstances a vote for Livingstone will be a vote for New Labour and for Blair.

In reality the powers of both the new Mayor of London and the GLA are very limited. There will be a £3.3bn budget (most of which is already spoken for) to cover police, transport, environment, roads. Compare that to the GLC which had much wider powers, including housing, and employed 27,000 people. If the new Mayor wanted to emulate New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's zero tolerance policies (and he probably will), he wouldn't be able to afford it.

Despite predictions by New Labour that big business will instantly leave London if Livingstone becomes Mayor, the City of London has been lapping up the Cheeky Chappie. The City has none of the illusions of the London Socialist Alliance: the rich know that Mayor Livingstone will be on a short leash, incapable of doing them any real damage. After all he's a comical fellow, unlike Dobbo Dobson, and they are all for a cheap laugh. What both candidates claim as the real difference between them - the future of London Underground - is also a red herring. Livingstone contrasts his proposed 'bond issue' to New

Labour's public/private finance initiative. The truth is that neither proposal will come up with enough money to modernise the tube, and the only cheap way of raising the money is for the state to borrow it. Blair and Prescott have ruled this out.

In the last week, Livingstone has been exposed as failing to declare £158,000 of income in the MPs' register of interests. This is the latest clumsy attempt by New Labour to discredit Livingstone and it has failed. But readers should think about this for a moment. This 'socialist' has formed a company called Local-action to receive his very large income from writing for newspapers and making speeches. Rich people can do this and thereby avoid paying tax. Poor people, and some of the poorest in Britain live in London, have no chance of doing this. Progressive taxation is a fair way of funding the services which poor people need but are often denied - the rich pay more. New Labour wants to keep taxation low to help its next election campaign; Livingstone doesn't like taxes and Dobson's answer to poverty in London is to raise £50m through a 'London Lottery' - another way of taxing the poorest and leaving the rich alone.

Are any of these people socialists? Clearly not. So if you are a socialist in London you will not be voting for any of them. Instead you will join the real campaign to expose these hypocrites and to win justice for London's working class and poor people.

* If voting changed anything, they'd abolish it. This is the title of Ken Livingstone's own account of his political career in local government and the GLC. Published by Collins, 1987, £12.00 (hbk), ISBN 0-00-217770-6, 367pp.

News Ireland: Executive suspended

On 11 February, Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson suspended the Executive and the political institutions drawn up under the Good Friday Agreement. The government's motive was to protect the position of David Trimble at the meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, the leading body of the Ulster Unionist Party, to be held the following day. When the UUP accepted the Mitchell Review, Trimble had signed a resignation letter, to come into force if the IRA had not begun the decommissioning process by 12 February. This self-imposed deadline was an attempt by the Unionists to reimpose their agenda on the 'peace process' and to appease those sections of Unionism opposed to the Good Friday Agreement. In the negotiations leading up to 12 February, the decommissioning body headed by General de Chastelain issued two reports. The first, issued on 31 January, stated that the IRA posed no military threat to the peace process and that the target of decommissioning by the end of

May was feasible. The second report was presented to the British and Irish governments on 11 February. This stated that the IRA would 'consider how to put arms and explosives beyond use'. On 5 February, in the middle of this intense period of negotiation, the IRA issued a statement which ended:

'We recognise the issue of arms needs to be dealt with in an acceptable way and this is a necessary objective of a genuine peace process - for that reason we are engaging with the decommissioning body. We have supported and will continue to support efforts to secure the resolution of the arms issue. The peace process is under no threat from the IRA.'

Despite the IRA's obvious commitment to the 'peace process' and its moves to begin a decommissioning process, the Labour government suspended the Good Friday Agreement. It knows that Adams, McGuinness are completely enmeshed in the 'peace process' and have nowhere else to go. The protection of Trimble's position was of paramount importance because as yet British imperialism doesn't want to confront those

sections of loyalism opposed to the 'peace process'. The suspension of the institutions does, however, bring with it dangers for Britain, particularly the dangers of instability within the nationalist community. But it is a chance Britain has been willing to take. It knows that Sinn Fein and the IRA will have to attempt to stop any effective opposition, armed or otherwise.

The suspension is viewed by Britain as only a temporary measure. Already, during the St Patrick's day events in Washington, proposals were being discussed to lift the suspension before IRA decommissioning actually begins. However quickly the suspension of the institutions is lifted, it is clear that Sinn Fein and the IRA are trapped in a mess of their own making. It is still British imperialism that is calling the shots, with Sinn Fein waiting to be 'invited' to the table.

However, there are the beginnings of voices of opposition to Sinn Fein's path of constitutional politics. Speaking at the launch of a new magazine *Fourthwrite* in Belfast, Brendan Hughes, a former IRA leader in Belfast and Officer-in-Com-

mand of Republican prisoners during the blanket protest in Long Kesh, said: 'The same old lies are regurgitated week in, week out. With the war, politics had some substance. Now it has none. The political process has created a class of professional liars and unfortunately it contains many Republicans.'

Unfortunately, the voices of these 'professional liars' will not be silenced until the voices of opposition form a new movement to fight in the interests of the working class and oppressed.

Bloody Sunday Inquiry: shoot-to-kill cover-up

In the lead-up to the opening of the Saville Inquiry into the murder of 14 civil rights marchers in Derry on 30 January 1972, it has emerged that the British army had a shoot-to-kill policy. Major-General Robert Ford, the officer in day-to-day command of British troops in the north of Ireland, three weeks before Bloody Sunday sent a secret

memo to his boss. In it he said: 'The minimum force necessary to achieve a restoration of law and order is to shoot selected ringleaders among the DYH [Derry's Young Hooligans], the army's term for militant youth, after clear warnings have been given'.

The only problem that Ford foresaw was that the large-calibre bullets fired by the British army's powerful rifles would pass through and kill more than one person. His answer was to suggest modifying some rifles to take a smaller bullet 'to enable ringleaders to be engaged, with less lethal ammunition'. Immediately before Bloody Sunday, Ford sent 30 modified rifles to Derry for 'training purposes'.

When the first British cover-up of Bloody Sunday (the Widgery Report) ended, 29 rifles, identified as having been fired by British soldiers on the day, were labelled and stored by the Ministry of Defence. In January 1998 Tony Blair announced the new Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday. Three days before his announcement, 14 rifles were destroyed and ten sold to private companies! In September, the MoD assured the Saville Inquiry that the five remaining rifles were secured with restricted access. Then, on 17 March, Defence Minister Geoff Hoon announced in the House of

Commons that two more rifles had been destroyed. To reassure any cynics about Labour's determination to get to the truth of Bloody Sunday, Hoon announced an inquiry into the destruction of these two rifles!

Fine words, but by Labour's deeds shall you know them. It was the very same Geoff Hoon who on 28 November obtained a court injunction against *The Sunday Times* to silence revelations about the murderous role of a branch of British military intelligence, the Force Research Unit (FRU), in Ireland. On 25 November, *The Sunday Times* published an article by Martin Ingram, a former member of the FRU. In it he revealed the FRU's involvement in burning down the offices of the Stevens Inquiry team, which was investigating the activities of British agent Brian Nelson, to destroy evidence. It was Nelson who provided loyalist assassination squads with the information they needed to murder nationalist Belfast lawyer Pat Finucane in 1989; an RUC Special Branch agent, William Stone, supplied the weapons. The FRU were Brian Nelson's handlers. Ingram also volunteered to give evidence at the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. The Labour government will stop at nothing to keep the lid on Britain's dirty war in Ireland.

Labour's Budget: generous to the rich, ruthless to the poor

DAVID YAFFE

With the patronising style that has become the hallmark of New Labour, Chancellor Brown, in presenting the Budget, told the nation that 'We have been prudent for a purpose: a stronger fairer Britain'. This was a Budget, we were assured, 'that unites the whole country, a Budget for all the people'. Debt was being paid back, barriers to business investment were being removed, employment opportunities were being expanded, taxes were being cut, millions were being lifted out of poverty, and spending on education and the NHS was being dramatically raised, and all of this 'not at the expense of our prudence' but 'because of our prudence'. In reality it has been the continuation of favourable economic circumstances that has allowed Labour to present its Budget in this way.

At the time of the last Budget nearly 40% of the world economy was in recession following the financial crisis of 1997-98. Since then, led by the US economy, a surge in consumer spending, driven by increased borrowing and rising stockmarkets, has produced a rapid recovery. As a result the British economy is growing faster than expected. Rising house prices and a booming stockmarket have seen personal wealth growing by 16% after inflation in 1999. Household consumption rose by 4.4% in 1999 and is expected to grow faster than real income. Borrowing has surged. Unsecured personal lending has risen by 50% over the last three years to £115bn, and secured lending - mortgages and other secured loans - rose 8% last year alone to £497bn. Savings have collapsed to levels not seen since the end of the 1980s and are projected to fall even further. So the favourable economic circumstances are fostering potential problems.

Constricted by a neo-liberal monetary policy (prudence), Labour has to ensure that the Budget does not fuel the fire and lead the Bank of England to increase interest rates even further. Higher interest rates would push up the value of an already overvalued pound, threatening to drive manufacturing industry into recession and increasing the likelihood of a serious balance of payments crisis. We should remember that the British economy is very vulnerable to a deterioration in the international economy and particularly to an ever more likely Wall Street-driven global stock-market crash. So the Budget's optimistic five-year forecasts mapping out the path to Nirvana should be taken with a pinch of salt.

A budget surplus

Brown took over as Chancellor just as Britain's public finances were beginning to recover from the large deficits of the 1990s. His luck has held. Faster than forecast economic growth, high tax receipts and lower social security spending have produced a totally unexpected and

massive current budget surplus of £17bn for 1999-2000. A budget surplus of £2.5bn had been forecast only one year ago. This is to be followed by a cumulative surplus of £51bn over the next four years. Yet, in spite of these remarkably fortunate circumstances, Labour still refuses to loosen the purse strings. Fiscal tightening next year - reduced public spending and/or tax increases - will be greater than promised in last year's Budget. Overall fiscal tightening since 1996-7 has amounted to a huge 4.2% of GDP or some £40bn. Labour's plans for the next four years will reduce this by only £15bn, following the small tax cuts and increased public spending announced in this Budget. Rather than seriously tackle poverty and the rapidly deteriorating public services, Labour will pay back public debt: this year £12bn, next year £5.5bn and £5bn in 2001-2. Only in the year 2002-03 will it begin to borrow again and then 'well within our fiscal rules'. Debt as a proportion of GDP will



Prime Minister Blair. Labour had no choice but to put a great deal more money into the NHS if it was not to alienate millions of middle-class voters.

fall from 37.1% this year to 32.7% in 2002-03, compared to the 44% Labour inherited in 1997. This is 'prudence' with a vengeance - a determination to serve the interests of its paymasters, banking and multinational capital.

Health and education

For the vast majority of the middle classes paying for private health and education would put a serious strain on their budgets. So adequately funded and relatively efficient public provision is fundamental to their needs.

In the first two years of office, prudence dictated a freeze on spending. The consequences have been devastating for the NHS. A normal outbreak of flu this winter, almost brought the NHS to a standstill. At times no intensive care beds were available. Horror stories dominated the press. Mavis Skeet, a middle-aged Yorkshire woman, had an operation for throat cancer postponed four times until the condition became inoperable.

Labour had no choice but to put a great deal more money into the NHS if it was not to alienate millions of middle-class voters. An extra £24bn will be spent on the health service over five years - a real increase of 35% or 5.1% a year. This amount will bring health spend-



Gordon Brown - misery for pensioners, megabucks for the rich

ing, including private health care, close to the present European average of 8% of national income, but is still significantly below the levels of France and Germany at 9.6% and 10.7% of GDP respectively. Much more investment will be required over a much longer period, if the NHS is adequately

to serve the needs of the working class after so many years of both Tory and Labour neglect. 'Prudent' Labour is not going to supply it.

The extra £1bn for education will barely begin to scratch the surface of the long-term underfunding facing the vast majority of inner-city working-class schools. The decision to bypass local authorities and put £300m of this money directly into the schools is a short-term palliative designed to appease teachers desperate for extra resources.

Deserving and undeserving poor

The deserving poor have become 'hard-working families' in this budget. They will receive tax credits to take them just above the poverty line. Minimum family income will rise by 7% to £214 a week, barely a living wage. Labour's claims to have lifted more than a million children out of poverty, out of the 4.6m in 1997, is no great achievement given the growing economy. Why so few, given the enormous resources available to the government? As the real incomes of the richer sections of the population rise, so does the implicit poverty line - half-average family income. It will be some time before statistics are available to assess Labour's claim and given the widening

disparities in wages as millions of workers are forced into low-paid jobs, it is clear that many poor 'hard-working families' will not escape poverty.

Brown made a great deal of the £50 increase in the winter fuel allowance to all pensioners. This will not begin to compensate for this year's miserable 75p a week increase in the basic pension - a point, unsurprisingly, missing from the Budget speech. Labour still refuses to increase pensions with earnings, following the Tory policy of upgrading them with prices. Last year there were 49,000 excess winter deaths as a result

of pensioners being unable to pay for the extra heating needed to keep out the cold. This winter the figure is expected to rise to 55,000. 'Prudence' is responsible for a large number of deaths.

Meanwhile the pressure on the 'undeserving poor' will be stepped up. Staying at home on benefits will no longer be an option for the over-25s if they are to receive the £40 a week Jobseeker's Allowance. Claimants will be investigated to ensure they are not making fraudulent claims and face tougher rules and penalties if they are caught out. Lone parents with children over five will now attend compulsory interviews with the employment service, under the threat of losing benefits, in what is clearly the first step in forcing them into work.

Promoting enterprise

The real beneficiaries of previous Labour Budgets have been the rich business class and this Budget is no exception in that rule. Under the guise of a 'major reform to reward enterprise and entrepreneurship', Labour cut the capital gains tax (CGT) from 40% to 10% for all business assets held for 4 years or longer, instead of the current 10 years. Britain, boasted Brown, now has both the lowest corporate tax rates for businesses ever and the lowest ever capital gains tax for

long-term investors. In addition, in an unprecedented move, he announced that employee shareholders would secure all the benefits of 10% capital gains tax. The 10 years will be backdated to April 1998.

The main beneficiaries of these measures will be some 100,000 of Britain's highest paid directors - the 'fat cats' of the Tory years. Fred Halworth, director of the Employee Share Ownership Centre pointed out that 'the gains here in some cases are going to be colossal'. Three internet company directors were said to be rubbing their hands with glee. They were holding shares worth £750,000, which can be sold in 2002 at a CGT rate of 10%. Such share holdings pale in significance alongside the £10m of Sir Martin Sorrell, chief executive of WPP, who received share options of 13.1m shares in the company last May worth £140m, or Jan Leach, chief executive of SmithKline Beecham, with options of 6.5m shares worth £57m and doubt many others among New Labour's business friends.

This then is Labour's Budget for 'all the people' - extraordinarily generous to the rich, patronising towards 'hard-working families', and ruthless to the poor.

Saving the NHS

HANNAH CALLER & ROBERT CLOUGH

Gordon Brown's pledge to put an extra '£2bn into the NHS on top of the £2.9bn promised last year, and then to increase NHS spending year-on-year by 6.1% on top of inflation sounds impressive. But if we look at the NHS's current state, we can see why the government had to abandon the plans it had put into place only last year. Readers will remember how they trumpeted a massive injection of £21bn into the NHS over a three-year period. But it was all a mirror trick, with money double and treble-counted. In reality the NHS was facing complete breakdown.

London Region is deeply in the red; it is estimated to be £140m overspent. Several London hospitals are effectively bankrupt. The total indebtedness of NHS trusts is £500m. One of the most serious problems is a rapid rise in the cost of generic drugs, which are predicted to increase by a further 11% per annum for each of the next two years. The NHS Confederation estimates that £600m of the £2bn is needed just 'to keep the NHS show on the road'. The enormous pressure on beds over the last three months, whether in intensive care or on the wards, demonstrates a system in crisis. After three years, the government has not achieved its pledge of cutting waiting lists by 100,000 - it is 60,000 adrift. In 1998/99, more than 56,000 people had operations cancelled, and whilst in 1999 the number



of planned operations rose by 10%, the number of cancellations rose by 12%. Images of A&E patients on trolleys waiting for ward beds to become available and increased waiting times for urgent cardiac surgery have threatened Labour's electoral support amongst the middle class and more affluent sections of the working class. Increasingly they have turned to the private sector. Since 1997, the number of people paying for private operations has risen by 40%, up to 160,000 in 1999. Nuffield Hospital confirms that the number of self-pay operations has risen 20% annually for the last two years.

With an election due in perhaps no more than a year, Labour had to pull a rabbit out of the bag. Yet just turning on a tap of money does not solve the problems of current investments. 12,000 new nurses cannot be trained overnight. The government's bad review points to a need to invest in intermedi-

ate care for patients who are unable to return home but who are not ill enough to require acute hospital bed. This will take years.

An Institute of Biomedical Science review has found 8% of NHS laboratories understaffed; that 56% used inappropriate or unqualified staff; one in ten had to call on clerical staff to carry out important tasks and cope with the workload. Such a shortage is not surprising. Even after five years' training and an honour's degree, a biomedical scientist can expect to earn less than £9,500 a year. If the NHS is to function, there is a need to pay adequate wage for the highly skilled workers that it requires. Yet this flies against the requirement to keep the NHS as cheap as possible. £2bn extra in 2000/01 may reduce the chances of further political embarrassment next winter. It will not achieve much more than that.

Zimbabwe faces ghastly prospects

DAVID KITSON

Zimbabwe, in the new millennium, faces ghastly prospects, dark and dismal as the tomb. The bottom line is AIDS: 25% of the population is HIV positive. People are dying like flies, at the rate of 1,700 per week. Unable to cope with the scale of this, the Minister of Health has been complaining that the Western metropolitan countries have been practising ethnic cleansing by keeping effective drugs that might help to counter AIDS out of reach of the populations of poor Third World countries. Malaria, the greatest killer in Africa, is striking people down. Now that we are in an above normal rainy season, with Cyclone Eline roaring down the Mozambique Channel, thousands get killed. There has been a cholera epidemic in West Mashonaland, which seems to have been contained, just as it was getting rather close for comfort. The carnage on the roads continues. People are fleeing the country, mostly looking for work, as unemployment is over 50% here. South Africa has expelled 35,000 people who had entered illegally.

Economic hardship dogged the year of 1999 all the way. Prices of most basic goods and services like maize meal, bread, milk, transport and school fees (in a country where primary education was once free) have doubled and trebled - let's say soared, and are still soaring. Suddenly, just before Christmas, most of the motor fuel disappeared: other commodities disappeared as well, only to reappear miraculously when

the prices went up. Noczim, the national fuel distribution organisation set up by the Smith regime when it was facing international embargoes, announced that the shortage was due to internal distribution problems which it would clear up. Fuel prices went up twice in weeks, the later rise being a New Year smack in the face. Despite this, diesel is in short supply again with huge queues forming at fuel pumps in garages. The whole management of Noczim was booted out last year due to their maladministration and corruption, leaving the organisation with a deficit of two billion dollars. The new lot doesn't seem to be doing any better. Barclays Bank undertook to fund Noczim for three months, but Mugabe took it on himself to lambaste the banks for their grasping ways, so Barclays withdrew. Zimbabwe's transport of goods and passengers runs on oil, so during the shortages most buses came to a halt and passengers couldn't get to work. News on TV has disclosed that the diesel arriving here is being sent on to the Congo, where Zimbabwe still has 10,000 troops and more.

A Commission was set up under Justice Chidyausiku to investigate the shameful manner in which leading members of the government ripped off the ex-Combatants Compensation Fund. To qualify for compensation you needed a doctor to assess disabilities arising from the Second Chimurenga, the war of liberation. The Commission reported that one minister of state managed to run a government department despite being '80% disabled' and receiving \$500,000 in compen-

sation. There were plenty of examples of this corruption. The Commission interviewed a sample of 115, not including the worst offenders.

The referendum on the new Constitution was held in February at a cost of \$252m and a further \$220m for advertising. The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was formed by a gaggle of human rights organisations, the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), and concerned individuals to campaign for a No vote. The NCA took full-page adverts in newspapers to publicise the deficiencies of the draft constitution, of which there are many, including clauses which would entrench Mugabe for another ten years. Inhabitants of Matabeleland worried that if a No vote succeeded, the Fifth Brigade would arrive and engage in another gukurahundi (storm). Thousands died or disappeared last time this happened in the mid 1980s.

Now the referendum has returned a No vote, and the government has continued with the Lancaster House constitution. Mugabe conceded defeat quite gracefully and left the country on his current round of state visits. About 1.3 million people voted, out of an electorate of about 5 million. Like other large cities, Harare voted 75% against, the overall vote being 55% against. Many rural supporters of ZANU did not vote. It is conjectured that there will be a big vote against ZANU in the upcoming elections in April, but my experience is that, in such elections, the ranks close. There is, however, a big voter registration campaign going on, with intending voters queuing



Movement for Democratic Change supporters

up in droves. 1.5 million new voters have signed on: they have grown up in the 20 years since independence and the liberation war is a legend which fades in comparison to current dissatisfaction.

Ten opposition parties have met under the sponsorship of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation to work together so as not to split the vote against ZANU. The most significant is the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), backed by the ZCTU and led by Tsvangirai and Sibanda. Ian Smith has announced his return to politics, claiming he can save the country from mismanagement and corruption. Meanwhile the executives of Noczim and the Grain Marketing Board are facing corruption charges and are out on bail.

The Helen Suzman Foundation, based in Johannesburg and dedicated to fomenting liberal democracy, conducted an opinion poll in January and February which revealed that 63% wanted ZANU (PF) to stop run-

ning the country and 65% wanted Mugabe to step down as President. ZANU politicians are attempting to cast whites into the role of scapegoats for the country's substantial troubles. Florence Chitaura, the Labour Minister, for instance, accused whites from South Africa of creeping into Zimbabwe to vote No. They would have had to have been registered voters. Estimates of the white population here are 45-150,000, in a population of nearly 12 million. Mind you, many of them are racists, but they are aging. The survey found that 80% of the voters thought it was not sensible to blame the white minority for Zimbabwe's problems.

Whenever a garage gets an allocation of motor fuel a queue of vehicles forms, with maybe 800 in it. People, black and white alike, wait for 4 hours to get about 18 litres of petrol. They talk to each other, play games, eat - you can guess who gets the blame. ZESA (Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority) participates in a peak load

sharing scheme with adjacent countries. The South Africans have terminated credit lines because they are not likely to get paid by Zimbabwe where the coffers are empty. So ZESA operates a load shedding scheme. Regularly our electricity goes off. We sit in the dark with no lights, heat or power, simmering. Because of the heavy rains the floodgates at Kariba Dam, at the head of a lake 160 miles long, have been opened. 20,000 people downstream have watched all their belongings being washed away in the flood.

There was provision for compulsory acquisition of land without compensation in the draft constitution. Ex-combatants and their hangers-on are frustrated because they have waited in vain each for his own bit of land for 20 years since liberation. They are invading farms, taking the land and sharing it out - 479 so far. Dabengwa, the Minister for Home Affairs, has ordered them off, especially the politically motivated opportunists. Mugabe has said they can stay. The invasions have been made a political dodge against the No vote, for which white farmers are being blamed. Seeing the writing on the wall, some farmers are helping invaders with food and farming implements and directing them to bits of land.

The election next month is going to be interesting. Most regard the future with trepidation. Meanwhile ZANU youths are clashing with MDC youths. MDC Security has exposed a state plot, denied by the CID, to assassinate Tsvangirai. The ZANU leadership is calling for economic reform and the removal of dead and aged wood. Fat chance! Mugabe's term of office ends in two years' time. What if he has to face a new hostile parliament? At least there will be a strong opposition. Some fear a coup in support of the present establishment.

Budget 2000: South Africa's 'deracialised capitalism'

DALE T MCKINLEY

Late on the morning of 27 February, South Africa's Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, strode confidently into a packed Parliament and dutifully presented the country's 2000 budget. In a display that would have made the 'Iron Lady' proud, Manuel told South Africa's 45 million people that the country is now in a 'better position than ever before' to face the challenges of mass unemployment and increasing poverty, because, 'we are one of the most attractive emerging markets'. He then proceeded to unveil a series of Thatcherite, trickle-down budget measures that he promised would put South Africa on 'the right track'.

The 'track' chosen is to offer a budget that sends all the right signals to domestic and international capital in the vain hope that these capitalists will invest and create jobs - the state is to 'facilitate' this process. As Manuel strode from his podium to the cheers of assembled politicians and power-brokers it

was clear to all but the most sycophantic that the South African 'transition' had come full circle. With the 2000 budget, the land of militant worker struggle and revolutionary potential now hangs up a very different welcome mat and it reads - 'Welcome to the world of deracialised capitalism'.

The health of economic debate in South Africa is in a sad state. Amongst the plethora of responses to the budget, there has been little criticism, except from political parties to the right of the ANC government and corporate economists. Even the long-standing organisations of the 'left', COSATU and the SACP, shied away from open, serious criticism.

So what's going on? One thing is for certain - the lack of open, vibrant and serious economic debate is a sure sign of a society headed for trouble.

The continued fetishisation of budget deficit reduction (2.2% by 2001) has an impact on capital spending for desperately needed poverty reduction. Even the World Bank estimated that South Africa could comfortably

run a budget deficit in the region of 6-8% and not adversely affect fiscal responsibility. Even a change of 1-2 percentage points in the deficit would release billions into the productive economy and for the provision of basic services for the poor.

The budget is based on a forecast of a 3.3% annualised growth rate for the next three years (as opposed to the present 1.7% rate). Assumptions about Foreign Direct Investment, expansion of exports and privatisation underpin the projected growth rate, assumptions misplaced in the past. The small increase in spending (R6.3 billion) depends on a growth rate projection which in turn is dependent on the vagaries of the global economy. If the projections fail to materialise the budget goes belly-up. This is diametrically opposed to a budget that has its foundations in a domestically-driven industrial strategy which seeks to create sustainable jobs and skills that will affect real growth, not be hostage to the dictates of international finance capital.

The announcement of infla-

tion targeting (a 3-6% band) will probably mean higher short-term interest rates. It is likely to lead to a parallel call for wage restraint on the part of organised workers, with appeals to 'patriotism' and the 'national interest'. Neither are applicable given the living standards of workers and the poor.

The gist of the tax reforms is that they are disproportionately weighted in favour of the rich and upper-middle income earners. There is absolutely nothing in it for the over 35-40% of the population that does not earn a formal salary, so it is fundamentally a gesture towards the privileged (for that is what having a job has now become - a privilege). Even amongst those who do have regular incomes, the upper spectrum of the tax brackets benefit most. The bottom rate gets a one per cent tax relief (from 19 to 18%), while the top marginal rate gets three per cent relief (from 45% to 42%).

The introduction of a capital gains tax has been wrongly hailed as a sign that the government is going after the wealthy. First, this type of tax is, as



President Thabo Mbeki

Manuel pointed out, already in use in all the major capitalist countries (and is often used as a reason for the government not to raise other corporate taxes). As such, it does not constitute any attack on the accumulation regime of the rich. Second, the tax gives a relatively low yield compared to profits made and is expensive to administer.

The tax concessions offered for donations to charitable organisations (including all NGOs), is a first step in replacing the necessary role of the public sector and turning such services over to the private sector (dutifully mimicking the 'global trends'). Likewise, tax conces-

sions for donors to pre-primary and primary schooling are little more than privatisation of educational funding through the back door. It removes public sector responsibility for this core area of education. Worse, it discriminates against schools whose community tax base is minimal or virtually non-existent, leaving the wealthier communities to benefit most from this tax change.

The 'thank you' that greeted Minister Manuel's freeze on VAT is a sad indictment of COSATU and the SACP. Only a few years ago the left called for the abolition of this most regressive tax. The maintenance of VAT can only widen the gap between the small rich and upper-middle income groups and the vast majority of South Africans.

Not content with one regressive consumption tax, Minister Manuel announced yet another fuel price increase (the latest in a long line of hikes related to ill-defined 'market forces'). It hits hardest at those without access to private vehicles (workers and poor), who will now pay more for taxi transport etc. Since the transportation system itself has been predominantly privatised, the lack of any affordable, mass public transport means that the increase will make life that much harder for the workers and poor.

Pinochet: Straw frees dictator

ROBERT CLOUGH

On 3 March, after 17 months' detention, General Pinochet was finally put on a plane back to Chile. On arrival in Santiago, he was able to walk unaided onto the airport tarmac and wave triumphantly to his supporters. Later his helicopter buzzed the presidential palace in a gesture of contempt for the civilian government.

The Tories rejoiced: Lady Thatcher complained that 'his health has been broken, the reputation of our courts has been tarnished and vast sums of public money have been squandered for a political vendetta'. Lord Lamont, leader of the Pinochet fan club, declared that 'no evidence has been offered against him', adding that 'the only evidence is the evidence of victims', oblivious it seems to the contradiction. Meanwhile Tory leader William Hague accused the government of wasting taxpayers' money on 'student politics'.

Thus ended an episode that had created serious political

embarrassment for the Labour government in general, and for Home Secretary Jack Straw in particular. Pinochet's unexpected arrest in September 1998 created a major political headache. On the one hand, Straw could not let him go without a very good excuse, and there were none to hand. On the other, he could not allow Pinochet to face trial in Spain, since such a trial of a one-time state leader would set an unacceptable precedent. Labour's problem was compounded when the House of Lords overturned a High Court decision, and ruled that Pinochet should face extradition proceedings, rejecting the defence that he had immunity as a former head of state.

Labour's main allies in securing a way out of its predicament were the Spanish and Chilean governments. While the Spanish judge Baltasar Garçon was pushing for Pinochet's extradition, the Spanish government was completely opposed, fearful of its impact on political and economic relations with the



Torturer Pinochet, kept in luxury at taxpayers expense, praised by Thatcher, released without trial by the Labour government

whole of Latin America. The Chilean government, led by President Frei, had accepted a settlement which effectively prevented any possibility of holding the former military junta to account for the murder, torture and disappearance of over 3,000 Chilean people. By appointing Pinochet 'senator for life', the settlement had given him parliamentary immunity and placed him beyond reach of the courts. However, when

Pinochet was alleged to suffer a series of 'mini strokes' in the autumn, the Chilean government made an appeal to have him released on medical grounds. Straw was sympathetic: it would be a great nuisance if Pinochet were to die whilst in custody. Hence he arranged for a series of medical tests to provide him with the alibi he needed to be rid of the 'English Patient', as Pinochet had been dubbed in the Chilean

press.

Yet Straw nearly blew it. When he announced on 11 January that he was 'minded' to send Pinochet back to Chile on the basis of his medical condition, he ruled that the reports on which he had made his decision could not be disclosed, even in court. This was unprecedented. The Home Office claimed that this was necessary because without the commitment to confidentiality, Pinochet would have refused to undertake the tests. It is now clear that the opposite was true: when the Home Office wrote to Pinochet's lawyers suggesting the tests, it made the pre-emptive offer that 'it should go without saying that every effort would be made by the doctors and their team, and the Home Office, to keep the report entirely confidential'. On 15 February, the High Court ruled that Straw had to disclose the medical reports on Pinochet to those countries seeking extradition because of the 'demands of fairness and transparency in the decision-making process'. Justice Dyson said that if Pinochet were allowed to return to Chile he would be unlikely to stand trial, and that 'in view of the gravity of the charges, that is a startling result of the exercise

of ministerial discretion' - but no more than Straw intended.

What of the tests themselves? Some of them were no more than uncorroborated statements by Pinochet himself that he had to be helped out of bed, that he could not shave or dress himself. Others were the sort of tests that are regularly faked; reports emerged that he had been coached beforehand by Chilean military psychiatrists. The end what the tests were does not matter, nor the eminence of those who performed them - they were always going to be a cover for a political decision. Whilst the French, Belgians and Spanish were making representations to Straw, he had to delay his decision for a few more days to give the semblance of considering them seriously. Yet the decision had been made months earlier. As we said in FRFI 153, Straw was never required to rule on whether Pinochet was fit to stand trial - that was up to the Spanish legal system once he had been extradited. However, Labour operates to standards that are set by the commercial and political interests of British imperialism. Hence the spectacle of Jack Straw, the scourge of refugees, the benefactor of mass murderers.

Women's work: low pay and inequality - plus ça change

CAT WIENER

'Historically, as a consequence of the necessity to perform domestic toil, women enter the labour force as low-paid workers, both to do jobs which have been deskilled by mechanisation and also to work in labour-intensive sectors. As a result of this, the tendency has been for "women's work" to be defined as such throughout the whole period... the common denominator of "women's work", whether in services, sweatshops or highly automated industry, is low pay for less skilled work... women continue to exist as a cheap labour force for capital.' (*Revolutionary Communist* 5, 1976)

Over the last decade, the growth of information technology has seen a surge in employment. But, as the March issue of *Labour Research* makes clear in an issue dedicated to women, the 'new' technology has, if anything, entrenched the 'old' oppression of women. For while men have entered the IT labour market as programmers, technical experts and managers, earning average wages of £27,167 pa (New Earnings Survey 1999), the overwhelming growth area for women has been in tele-services call centres. Horded in rows in vast warehouse-like rooms, constantly supervised and monitored, forced into a mind-numbing monotonous script from which they dare not deviate, these call centres are the new factories, employing a quarter of a million people, 70% of whom are women. *Labour Research* makes the point: 'In many ways they resemble traditional factory production lines in much of the work. Indeed, the



technology has been used precisely to standardise the process of receiving and making telephone calls and so increase the productivity of staff. Average salaries (based on the most recent Incomes Data Services survey of 150 call centres) are £12,150 but many such centres have starting salaries even lower, around £8,000-£10,000.

The call centres involve a major process of deskilling, relying as they do on what managers perceive as women's 'natural' skills - a pleasant voice, helpful attitude, 'smiling down the phone'. Women predominate in the lowest-skill areas of financial services, contracted-out teleservices from other companies, sales and retail. Significantly, higher-skilled (and higher-paid) areas such as computer companies' help-desks, see a far higher proportion of men employed. At the other end of IT, women hold just 11.7% of all managerial posts and, while women make up 27% of trainee programmers, by principal programmer level that figure has

dropped to just 8%.

These figures are significant in that they show the entrenchment of women's oppression in a growth area heralded as somehow new and breaking the mould of employment practices, but low pay and invidious working conditions are true for women across the board. 30 years after the Equal Pay Act came into force, average salaries for women in Britain are still only three-quarters of those for men, despite some improvements brought about by the minimum wage. Across Europe, when figures for salaries are adjusted to take into account occupational structure, industrial sector and age, British women earn less in relation to men than women in any other country apart from Greece. They remain concentrated in traditionally low-paid sectors (clerical - 39% of working women but only 12% of men; wholesale and retail - 22% of working women, 16% of men) and services such as nursing/care assistants, catering and hairdressing.

and are more likely to have to work part-time.

What, then, is to be done? The TUC says it 'wants better laws to make sure women get equal pay'. Perhaps it should get its own house in order first. There is not one single female general secretary of a TUC union with over 7,500 members. Unison, for example, the biggest union, has a female membership of 72%, but only 21% of its full-time national officers are women; the T&G, meanwhile, appears to feel it has something to celebrate by appointing, last year, its first-ever female regional secretary! Meanwhile, when low-paid women go into struggle against appalling terms and conditions, whether the strikers at Hillingdon Hospital, Burnells, the Tameside care workers or the predominantly female SkyChefs workers, it is precisely these unions which sell them down the river.

Besides, it is not tinkering with a law here or a law there which will make any difference to the real substance of women's oppression. Childcare in Britain remains the worst in Europe, particularly for the poor: a recent report from the Daycare Trust says for poor children access to quality childcare is as much a 'pipe dream' as private education. While 600,000 children under three in this country live in poverty, there are only 42,740 free or subsidised places. It is this absence of childcare, the burden of domestic duties, the fact that women, as carers, remain the safety net for failing social and health services, that entrenches women's position as a low-paid labour force.

As we wrote 24 years ago, 'The failure of Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination laws, lack of trade union organisation, women's employment as low-paid and part-time workers, all aspects of their social inequality, are not matters that can be overcome by legal reform, but have their basis in the oppression of women as domestic slaves which capital is unable to overcome.'

Section 28: bigots come out of the woodwork

RICHARD ROQUES

Section 28 was brought in by the Thatcher Government in 1988 to prevent local authorities from promoting homosexuality or teaching in their schools of the acceptability of homosexuality as a family relationship. New Labour came to power committed to its repeal but four years later it is still on the statute book. The wording of the law is so vague as to be thought unenforceable yet it has frightened thousands of teachers into refusing to talk about homosexuality in schools. Some local councils have used it as a convenient excuse to refuse funding to gay and lesbian projects, arguing that they could be prosecuted.

The Tories are opposed to repeal and church leaders wish to retain the law despite the fact that if the gay clergy all resigned they'd probably have to close half the churches. Only a million people now attend church on a regular basis and figures for homosexuality show that 10% of the population are gay. Gays outnumber them now but Christians' prejudices govern society.

Michael Portillo admits he had sexual relations with men when he was younger, yet he says he is against the repeal of Section 28. This opportunistic peep out of the closet is more offensive than when he lied about his sexuality. Portillo made his 'revelations' because everybody knew already and if it came out before he came out it could have damaged his career. Many homosexual men, even those who are open about their sexuality, feel at home in the

Tory Party. They are expressing a class position. For years the ruling class has condemned homosexuality in public while ensuring that practising homosexuals in the government or positions of power don't get caught with their pants down. Britain has the highest figure for teenage pregnancy in Europe and open discussion in schools of sex and sexuality would benefit gay and straight young people. This is prevented simply by bigotry.

The Tories don't want to repeal Section 28, New Labour say they want to, but don't. Stonewall, (supposedly a gay rights campaigning group) say they want to 'soften' Section 28. Their political allegiance to New Labour is more important than their very reason for existence, namely to work for lesbian and gay equality.

Gay activists, fuelled by the flood of homophobia that accompanied the AIDS epidemic, have done great work fighting anti-gay laws. But what happens when there is an equal age of consent and Section 28 is repealed? Will gay men and lesbians be acceptable then? Will homophobia die out? Of course not. Working class lesbians and gay men will still encounter hostility and physical attack because homophobia has been the prevailing philosophy of the ruling class for hundreds of years. Until openly gay activists are part of the struggle against racism, poverty and inequality, the massive residue of homophobia, which is unfortunately present in perhaps the majority of people, will never go away.

Austria

Haider and Blair: two faces of fascism

TREVOR RAYNE

'The world is the site of a civil war in which all of humanity is caught up, the war of the rich against the poor... Haider knows whose side he is on. The other politicians of Europe know also. But they don't say.' Jeremy Seabrook, 8 February, *The Guardian*

The clamour against immigrants and asylum seekers is dimmed not day after day across the European Union. *The Sun* rails against 'scroungers', illegal immigrants and criminals sucking this country dry' and says 'We need deportations on a huge scale and harsh sentences on our own cheats' - this from a corporation that has not paid a penny in tax since 1988. Political parties from right to left target people from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia in criminalisation and deportation campaigns. It is no mystery that millions of people in Denmark, Italy, France, Switzerland etc are rallying to the call of overtly racist and fascist parties. For Seabrook, Haider 'represents the beneficiaries of modest privilege against the masses of the poor, wretched, the outcast of the earth.' This not so 'modest' privilege is built on the transmigration of three billion people to survive on less than two dollars a day. Haider is part of an intensified attack upon the poor nations of the world and the poor within the rich capitalist nations. It is necessarily racist. We help destroy their states, rob their resources and bomb them - then they turn up on our doorsteps.

On 3 February five of Haider's Freedom Party representatives became ministers in a new coalition government in Austria after it won 27% of the vote at a general election. The European Union imposed a ban on bilateral meetings with Austrian ministers. US Secretary of State Albright temporarily recalled the US envoy to Austria saying that the Freedom Party 'does not clearly distance itself from the atrocities of the Nazi era and politics of hate.' But without cancelling the racist policies imposed on immigrants and ethnic minorities in the USA and European Union, these measures are window dressing.

The Freedom Party was formed by supporters of the Nazi party which governed Austria during World War Two. For 25 years it was led by a former Waffen SS lieutenant. Haider inherited an estate from

his Nazi-supporting family, gained from Jewish people dispossessed by the Nazis. After the war the Allies treated Austria as a victim of Nazi occupation, not a collaborator. Contemporary political parties and trade unions have benefitted from the dispossession of Jewish property. Haider has praised the SS, called the concentration camps 'punishment camps', praised Nazi employment policies as 'orderly' and called Poles 'car thieves', Yugoslavs 'burglary experts', and Russians 'experts in blackmail and mugging'. The Freedom Party has called for compulsory identity cards for non-EU migrants. Writing on 22 February in *The Daily Telegraph*, Haider lists ten points on which he says he and Blair agree. Both seek to escape the 'rigidities of the welfare state', meaning benefits to the unworthy. Both support the



Anti-fascists in Berlin demonstrated against a pro-Haider march



Haider

family, meaning allowances only to the select. Both support a 'crack-down on crime' and support 'law and order'. Both claim state benefits discourage work. Both support the 'information super-highway'. Both support the market economy. Both want lower taxes. Both want to stop 'scroungers' and 'benefit cheats'. Both seek to promote private pension schemes. And, says Haider, he is 'arguably less tough on asylum seekers and immigrants than Labour and Blair'. Who can dispute this when Labour passed the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act which forbids any local authority supporting asylum-seekers whose benefit claims are rejected, even if they suffer 'destitution or physical effects of destitution' - homelessness, malnutrition, starvation? Already poor countries are being forced to accept the return of emigrants in exchange for access to the EU for their products. Haider is an outcast from Europe's racist club only because he lacks the necessary duplicity to commit the deed with the minimum of fuss.

Free Hikmet Bozat!

NUSS JAMESON

Supporters of Kurdish prisoner Hikmet Bozat have launched a campaign to prevent his deportation from Britain to Turkey.

Together with two other Kurdish refugees, Cafer Kovaycin and Servet Ozon, Hikmet Bozat was convicted in 1994 of conspiring to commit and committing acts of arson against Turkish banks in London. Similar acts took place in cities across Europe in protest against the Turkish government's vicious campaign against Kurdish nationalism, which at the time took the form of razing villages and towns to the ground, massacring civilians and forcefully displacing millions of people to cities in western Turkey.

All three men have always denied participating in the attacks but were found guilty and given heavy sentences. Cafer and Hikmet were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment each, which was reduced on appeal in 1996 to 12 years. Servet Ozon was initially sentenced to serve 12 years but the appeal court took into account his youth and reduced the sentence to eight years. He was released at the end of 1998. All three were additionally sentenced to be deported to Turkey at the end of their sentences; however in Servet's case this was overturned at the appeal.

Shortly after the men were sentenced Cafer Kovaycin was brutally attacked and burned with boiling oil. There is little doubt that this was a politically motivated attack ordered by Turkish fascists within the prison system, on behalf of supporters of the Turkish state outside prison. Cafer has still not recovered from his injuries and continues to require medical treatment.

In December 1999 Cafer and Hikmet reached the halfway point in their sentences and applied for early release on parole licence. Cafer's application was refused and he is awaiting the outcome of an appeal. Hikmet was granted parole but this did not result in his release, merely in his being transferred from the custody of the Prison Service to that of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Free Satpal Ram from the racist prison system

On 16 March campaigners for Satpal Ram met Prisons Minister Paul Boateng, who agreed to look into Satpal's prison security category and location. Campaigners are hopeful that this will result in a move to a Category C prison near Birmingham.

At the same meeting John McDonnell MP presented Boateng with the telephone monitoring logs from Full Sutton prison, in which officers had written comments such as 'foreign crap, well dodgy' and 'talks in Paki'. Boateng was visibly stunned and left the meeting temporarily to speak to the head of High Security Prisons, returning to promise a full inquiry.

The Guardian the following day revealed that there had already been an inquiry by



Hikmet Bozat's family has serious fears that if he is deported to Turkey he will be subject to brutal reprisals for his political sympathies. They believe that the nature of his criminal conviction in this country will ensure the Turkish authorities have deep-seated reasons to target him for further persecution.

Hikmet has strong family connections in London and his brothers Rifat and Abuzer have both been granted full refugee status in Britain with, almost ironically, a central part of their asylum applications being based on the fact that they would be persecuted as a result of Hikmet's political activities.

During his sentence, Hikmet has corresponded with FRFI and we have published several of his letters. In his latest letter, Hikmet says: 'I am still hoping to be released and to be able to continue a normal life with the members of my family who live in London. My life was already in danger in Turkey, and after this conviction it is not going to be any better. In other words I would face death in Turkey I hope that the British government will take this into account.'

Letters demanding that Hikmet Bozat is recognised as a political refugee and released from detention should be sent to: Jack Straw, Secretary of State, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT (fax 0171 773 3965) and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Integrated Casework Unit, Block C, Whitgift Centre, Croydon CR0 1AT (fax 0181 760 3183). Quote reference B505949 and send a copy of any response to: Free Hikmet Bozat Campaign, BM Free Hikmet Bozat, London WC1N 3XX. The campaign can also be contacted on 07939 598818 or free-hbozatcamp@aol.com

Public meeting: Saturday 1 April, 3pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1N 3XX.

Chechnya: the horror continues

TALBOT

The devastated capital of Chechnya, Grozny, and many Chechen villages now resemble the scene from a futuristic science fiction film set after a nuclear holocaust. Ferocious Russian shelling has reduced much of the region to rubble. People, overwhelmingly the old, poor and disabled who cannot get away, are still picking out a primitive existence among the debris and making occasional forays to Russian soup kitchens. The war remains characterised by its brutal nature.

Moscow apartment bombings reassessed

In the last issue of FRFI we said that we might never know who planted the terror bombs in two Moscow apartment blocks killing over 200 people - bombs which the Putin regime immediately blamed on Chechen terrorists and used to justify the invasion of Chechnya.

However, new evidence indicates that the Russian security services may well have planted the bombs themselves. On 22 September last year police in Izmailovo, some 94 miles south of

Moscow, arrested two Russians attempting to plant a bomb in the basement of a 13-storey apartment block housing 250 people. The bomb was timed to detonate at 5.30am to inflict the maximum number of casualties.

Local bomb squad officer Yuri Tkachenko confirmed that the device contained Hexagen, the same explosive as that used in Moscow, and that it had a similar detonator. Case solved? Not quite. The arrested men flashed FSB (Russian secret police) identity cards and were quickly released. On 24 September, the FSB said the whole incident was a 'training exercise' and that the bomb was simply sugar. Unfortunately for the FSB, the Ryazan bomb squad had not only retrieved the detonator but also had already used a gas analyser to show the presence of Hexagen.

War crimes

The Kremlin now claims there is no more large-scale fighting. But there is no doubt that both sides have committed war crimes. Russia may have cleared its troops of February's killing of some 60 Chechen civilians in the Grozny suburb of Alady, but it has refused to allow a

European Union Humanitarian Officer into Chechnya to undertake their own investigations. One of the main critics of Russia's conduct in the war has been Human Rights Watch. It claims that the Russians are continuing to execute civilians, bomb civilian targets, loot, abuse civilians and commit widespread rape. One of its main concerns is the 'filtration camps' where the Russian military is attempting to 'filter out' Chechen fighters from the general population. Meanwhile, Chechen fighters have beaten and threatened civilians who tried to spare their villages from Russian bombardment. They have also endangered civilians by taking up positions in heavily populated civilian areas and firing at Russian aircraft. 'Chechen fighters are endangering civilians by trying to hide in their midst', said Holly Cartner, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia Division. Chechen rebels routinely slit the throats of captured Russian soldiers. The execution of prisoners of war is specifically prohibited by the Geneva Conventions and constitutes a war crime. The horrific carnival of reaction continues.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED FOR RONNIE EASTERBROOK

As we go to press, Ronnie Easterbrook, who has been refusing solid food since November and is now at Belmarsh Prison, has stopped taking liquids. The Criminal Cases Review Commission continues to refuse to refer his case back to the Court of Appeal. Ronnie received four life sentences in 1988 following an armed robbery, which was set up by a police informer. He was then aged 57 and is now 69 years old. Despite the withdrawal of his solicitor and barrister shortly before the trial, the CCRC does not accept that his right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights has been violated.

Readers are asked to fax urgent letters of protest to the CCRC on 0121 633 1804.

Strangeways Prison Protest -

Ten Years On

The protest in the chapel rapidly spread to the whole prison. Large parts of the gaoi were destroyed and a small group of militant prisoners remained on the roof-top for 25 days. The uprising was the biggest and longest prison protest in British history and sent shock-waves throughout the whole prison system, with disturbances in over 20 other prisons. Despite vitriolic press coverage, there was massive sympathy and tacit support from thousands of people, many of whom had had their own experiences of the inside of local gaois. In the articles below, three prisoners who were at Strangeways in April 1990 assess the progress, or lack of it, since then, and an FRFI comrade who was involved in supporting the prisoners and their families recounts the inspirational nature of the protest.

No lessons learned

The rebellion at Strangeways in 1990 created an initial liberalisation of the prison system, represented by the Woolf Report, and a clear recognition on the part of the system that progressive change in the treatment of prisoners was desperately required if further rebellion was to be avoided.

The causes of the Strangeways rebellion were deep-rooted and stemmed from the refusal of the system to recognise that prisoners, whatever their crimes, were entitled to be treated as human beings with basic inalienable human rights.

Unfortunately, it required an open rebellion to persuade the prison system that treating prisoners as animals was no longer viable in terms of control. The brief liberalisation of penal practice and debate following Strangeways was resisted by certain elements in government and the Home Office and, following the appointment of Michael Howard as Home Secretary, these elements regrouped and went on the offensive.

Using the excuse of the Whitemoor and Parkhurst escapes of 1994/5, Howard and his followers instigated a set of policy changes that were to transform prison regimes in the most negative way and shift the balance between rehabilitation and security clearly towards the latter. No longer would even a vestige of humane treatment be allowed to interfere with a determination to 'get tough' on prisoners and make gaois impregnable.

Under a new so-called Earned Privileges Scheme, prisoners now had to 'earn' access to basic rights and privileges by 'good behaviour', usually interpreted by prison staff to mean total obedience to their power and authority. Prisoners were now categorised into three 'Privilege Levels': Basic, Standard and Enhanced. This effectively created a sort of class system designed to divide and rule prisoners. In some gaois those prisoners on 'Basic regime' are held in conditions indistinguishable from those in punishment units.

The Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme is a control mechanism that operates in a completely arbitrary way and allows prison staff to

It is ten years since prisoners took over the chapel of Strangeways prison, Manchester in protest at the degrading and brutal treatment which was rife not just in that prison, but in almost every 'local' gaoi throughout the country. Prisoners on remand or serving short to medium-length sentences would be cooped up for 23 hours a day, three to a cell, with no sanitation and extremely limited access to the outside world in any shape or form. As if this were not enough, they were subject to a constant barrage of intimidation, both verbal and physical, from thuggish prison officers, who treated prisoners worse than animals and considered themselves accountable to no-one. Assaults were a daily occurrence, as was the forcible injection of tranquillizing drugs.

legitimise their victimisation of perceived 'troublemakers' and 'subversives'.

Also central to the strategy of control was the creation of control-unit type regimes in prison segregation units, which are specifically designed to subdue and break the spirit of prisoner activities. The brutalisation of prisoners held in segregation at Wormwood Scrubs was an obvious symptom of this approach and is just the tip of an extremely large iceberg.

The creation of the already infamous Woodhill Close Supervision Centre for disruptive prisoners is another symptom of the official determination to eradicate resistance among prisoners and prevent disturbances on the scale of Strangeways. Overall the level of control and security exerted over prisoners has now become all-pervasive and total, and an atmosphere of outright repression prevails in most penal establishments.

The lessons that should have been learned from Strangeways, ie fair and humane treatment and access to natural justice, have been ignored and jettisoned, and instead there is a determination to crush and destroy the will of prisoners to protest and complain.

This oppressive approach manifests itself in every area of prisoners' lives but while the prison system pursues its current strategy of screwing down gaois, the resentment and anger of prisoners is growing and the spectre of another Strangeways is very apparent. As before the Strangeways rebellion, prisoners are being pushed and driven to the very limit of their endurance and it won't be very long before they begin to push back.

Tony Bush, HMP Altcourse

Tony was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for his participation in the Strangeways revolt, plus 18 months for escaping from Manchester Crown Court during his trial.

Brutality, bullying and degradation

The Strangeways uprising resulted from our living conditions and the brutality, bullying and degradation we were subject to from prison officers. There is a real need to recognise the Prison Service always promoted living conditions as the cause of the uprising, yet makes no mention of the brutality, fear, humiliation and institutional bullying within the prison system, which were in fact the primary cause of the uprising. Living conditions were an issue, but not the issue.

The Prison Service professes living conditions to be seen as the cause because recognition of the primary reasons behind the uprising would

have brought into question the need to introduce a system where prison staff are accountable for their behaviour, rather than continue with the current system and its pseudo-accountability which allows any abuse to go unchecked.

Following the Strangeways uprising, brutality drastically declined, humiliating and degrading treatment virtually ceased, real progress was made in the humane treatment of



prisoners. But in the mid 1990s high profile escape attempts were used as a reason for a return to brutality, humiliation, degradation and institutional bullying, all in the name of security. A decade after the Strangeways uprising the same issues have returned.

Stewart Bowden, HMP Long Lartin

Stewart was not tried for involvement in Strangeways, but his presence on the first day of the protest has continued to be held against him by the prison system. He has been charged and twice acquitted of Prison Mutiny at Full Sutton prison.

Hypocritical system

The Strangeways incident of 1990 was a momentous event, which will echo through the years to come. It has been a decade since that event and what gravity of change positive and negative that decade has brought. I am only equipped with my own experiences, although attention is given to those I have had the pleasure

of being acquainted with, who have experienced and still are experiencing various acts of brutality, oppression, racism and the typical prison system way of functioning by means of resentment and antagonism.

Since Strangeways I have been confronted with these extremes and more, even to the extent where scumbag warders have attempted to maim and kill within the confines of segregation units. Such treatment is still enmeshed within the system and it is illogical to expect other employees of the system - teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists - to deplore it, as they all acquiesce. The functioning of the Prison Service is backward and the

Some memories of the Strangeways protest

I remember turning a corner in the road to the gaoi and looking up at its hideous shape. The sight of tiny figures, sitting, playing, enjoying themselves, was amazing like a huge fist in the face of the Prison Service.

There were a few people standing over the road and after meeting up with a comrade I decided to sell some papers. My first attempts were met with suspicion, but when I explained that we were there in solidarity with the prisoners, faces warmed: 'He too', was often the response, 'I know what it's like in there'. Nothing more needed to be said; it was like a silent tribute.

Sometimes the weather was sunny but other days were awful. One Sunday afternoon it snowed! There was a small group of picketers and we spent ages joking and laughing with one of the prisoners who had managed to crawl along a very narrow part of the roof almost overhanging the road. He didn't even have a jumper on and was apologetic about leaving us when the cold finally got to him.

The best times were with the relatives. I remember after one press conference, going for a drink with some mothers and girlfriends of the prisoners. 'Tell us about communism; what is it?' They were so impressed and incredulous that FRFI would tell the truth and support them and their loved ones, not tell the lies of most of the media.

And the pickets the RCG helped organise with the relatives were strong. One

rules are designed to underpin prisoners' capabilities, particularly through courses which they threatened into attending. Her Frankland prisoners who are appearing are told by Sentence Planning Boards: admit your guilt - it could be beneficial! Failure to admit results in removal from Enhanced privilege level to Standard.

With regard to my personal circumstances, I have now served years of a life sentence and still no prospect of release, maybe because I remain physically and mentally strong and am not prepared to go under in the face of this hypocritical system. They are good at making rhetoric when pointing fingers at other nations which commit barbaric acts and treatment but then such has been the practice of the British establishment throughout history.

Alan Lord, HMP Frankland

Alan was sentenced to life imprisonment and could reasonably have expected to have been released by now, however in addition to years concurrent imprisonment he was given his presence at Strangeways, the prison system using the expandable provisions of the sentence to render his chances of release non-existent.



young woman really laid into some screws prowling nearby, and they scolded off. There were grandmothers and mothers holding up babies and toddlers to see dad and send him your love. Some of those children must be teenagers now. I hope they're proud of their fathers.

On estate sales in Manchester at the time I can remember seeing children climbing on walls pretending to be men on the roof of Strangeways.

Alexa Brown

Strangeways 1990 - a serious disturbance

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In February 1999, the Macpherson Report, the first major investigation into policing since the Scarman Report 18 years before, was published. It represented the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, set up to investigate why the Metropolitan police failed to bring to justice the killers of the black teenager murdered in 1993. The report, an indictment of institutionalised racism throughout the police, made 70 recommendations for sweeping changes and prompted calls for an investigation of racism in every area of national life. It was trumpeted as a 'watershed in the history of race relations in Britain'. Yet a year on, inevitably, Britain remains as racist as ever.

Still fighting police harassment

When Winston Silcott was framed for the killing of PC Stakelock in the Broadwater Farm uprising of 1985, his friend Delroy Lindo was instrumental in setting up the campaign to gain justice for Winston and has continued to campaign for his freedom ever since. The response of police in north London has been continuous, systematic harassment of Delroy and his family. FRFI spoke to Delroy Lindo and his wife Sonia.

DL: The Lawrence Report highlighted the racism which we all knew about, which black people feel on the road every single day. But at the end of the day I haven't seen any change: the police continue to pick on us for nothing, stop, search and arrest us, beat us up and subject us to excessive use of force. The only difference is that it's now easier to talk about it and, when we put campaign posters up, they stay up.

Once we were followed home by a group of police officers who had arrested us before. We had got off in that case, so they wanted revenge. Outside our home they put their sirens on, drew their batons and told us to get out of the car. They proceeded straightaway to handcuff us both. They told the neighbours they were doing a drug search, to justify what they were doing and assassinate our characters. I was thrown in the van. We were taken to the police station.

SL: We had already had to send our two younger children to my mother in America, because it was getting so bad. They were crying all the time and when they went to school teachers were phoning us about them. My younger boy would wander into the playground and try to get out to come back home because he was so worried about us.

So on that day, only our older son was there. And he was watching out the window the police attacking his mum and dad and dragging us into the van. He came out crying. I called out to him to go into the house and call his auntie to go and collect him. Before I could finish what I was saying, they dragged me into the van and I kept crying and saying 'Let me at least finish talking to my son' and I was shouting 'Tyronne, go in, lock the door'.

DL: And they didn't make any provisions for him with social services or anything, even though he was alone

in the house. Sometimes the younger children have been there, too. This is a regular pattern. They have arrested me from my house, knowing the children are home, but they don't care. So what has changed?

SL: They charged Delroy with dangerous driving, threatening behaviour, failing to stop for a constable and me with breach of the peace.

DL: Like every other charge against us, all the charges ended in not guilty verdicts. At one point they said I'd driven down a road and made an oncoming bus swerve.

SL: We'd spoken to people and checked the bus maps and provided our solicitor with all the evidence that no buses go down that road. So the police went to fetch this inspector to try and confirm it, but he couldn't. They said that we had made this bus swerve and passengers were hurt and we had caused an old lady to nearly be knocked down and somebody else had been crossing the road, pushing a pram. And the police were asked where all these witnesses were, but not one was present. The only witnesses were police.

FRFI: What is happening to you began when you started campaigning for Winston Silcott. How much is it linked still?

DL: As soon as something happens with him, something happens to me. In December 1999, when there were full-page articles about Winston in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, our son was racially attacked. We arrived on the scene at the same time as the police. As soon as the police saw it was us, they attacked us. They forgot about the attack on my son.

SL: I jumped out of the car and said to the man 'What are you doing to my son?' Delroy got out of the car too but went back to park properly and attend to the children who were in it. The policeman on the scene followed him, calling for back-up. By the time he got to the car there were nine police cars and one van.

Delroy was on the ground with a swarm of police around him like bees. I started to panic because I thought they were going to kill him. Then two police grabbed hold of my right arm and two grabbed hold of my left arm, and they said 'Arrest her too'. They were shouting at people, 'If you don't move out, we'll arrest you too.' The whole road was cordoned off. Our children were crying. Then I felt an enormous blow to my face. I couldn't see and I thought I'd

lost my eye. Slowly I realised that I could still see and that the police had let go of me. I went to my car and locked myself in it with my children. I could feel my face swelling. They put Delroy in a van.

It took two hours to find out which police station Delroy was at. So we went there - to Tottenham - and when we arrived there was a crowd outside. There was a protest and National Talk Radio had phoned the police station to find out whether it was true that they had arrested Delroy Lindo, the campaigner for Winston Silcott. I was sitting in reception and I could hear the police on the phone to the journalist saying 'No comment'. Members of the Movement for Justice protested outside the police station and National Talk Radio interviewed me and people on the protest. All this time my face was swelling.

He was released at about 1am and the radio announced it. He was charged with two assaults on police and threatening behaviour. All three of us, including Tyronne, had to go to the Whittington Hospital for treatment and they told me my cheekbone was fractured.

FRFI: How do you deal with these constant attacks?

DL: The only thing that keeps me going is my wife's thirst for justice, my thirst for justice and the way we work as a team. At some point an individual would say 'I can't take no more'. But when one of us can't take it and has to rest the other one takes over for a while.

At first, I thought it was bad but inevitable. But it reaches a point when you say 'That's it - time to fire back'. We are taking a civil action against the police for the years of harassment and we are having a lot of marches and generating publicity.

We have also been supporting other people who face police harassment. We've been dealing with stop-and-searches. When we see them we jump out and ask why they are doing it and whether they are following the correct procedures. And we go to police consultative meetings and we ask questions.

SL: The last meeting we went with Mrs Sylvester and the Commander was saying that there have been ten murders in Haringay in the last year. Mrs Sylvester was very upset, so I said 'Excuse me, I am a bit confused here - I believe that there have been 11 murders. What about Roger Sylvester?' He was so angry and said 'Roger Sylvester is not a murder, it is

a death in custody.' When Delroy spoke he was warned that anything he said would be used as evidence against him in court.

DL: So I said 'Are you threatening me? Because I am not frightened and I am going to say what I have to say'.

SL: That meeting was held a week or so after a march we'd organised. When we got there a police officer asked us: 'Are there going to be a lot of people coming?' I said 'Well, it's not my meeting, I can't say'. When we left the meeting, I saw that they had mounted police out there and I thought 'Oh my god, that march really did affect them'.

Winston Silcott's conviction for the murder of PC Stakelock was overturned on appeal in 1991. However he is still serving a life sentence for the killing in self-defence of Anthony Smith. Last year he was awarded substantial compensation for the wrongful conviction but tabloid newspapers and the Police Federation continue to claim he is guilty and black the witness.

Victory against racist police

On 21 March an Old Bailey judge dismissed charges of indecent assault against Duwayne Brooks, the friend who was with Stephen Lawrence on the night he was fatally stabbed, after the defence claimed that to continue would be an abuse of due process. The case collapsed after it became clear that a crucial statement made to police by the mediator appointed to help Duwayne Brooks' alleged victim had been withheld by Scotland Yard. In the statement, the mediator told police that the alleged victim had not been assaulted and had made it up. Her mother has claimed the girl was used by police to 'get at' Duwayne Brooks. In the years since the murder of Stephen Lawrence - when Duwayne Brooks was initially treated as a potential suspect and later intimidated as a witness - Duwayne has been arrested six times. Previous charges have ranged from accusations of carrying an offensive weapon (found to be, in fact, work tools), allegations of kidnapping, and violent disorder. In each case, all action against him has been dropped. It is clear that Duwayne Brooks is being subjected to systematic harassment for the stand he has taken against police racism in the long struggle to achieve justice for Stephen Lawrence.

Fight racism

The number of racist attacks and murders since April 1998 shows that the Macpherson Report has had little impact on a society where racists appear able to maim and kill with impunity, while police remain at best indifferent and at worst perpetrators of such attacks themselves. Each time, it is the families and friends of the victims themselves who are forced to take up the fight for justice.

April 1999 Stellics Economou was pushed under a train in London after helping two black women who were being racially abused. The arrested man pleaded guilty to manslaughter on grounds of diminished responsibility.

June 1999 Liban Ali was set upon in Leicester City centre by a white gang. He is now in a persistent vegetative state. Only one of those arrested was charged with attempted murder. He pleaded guilty to GBH, was commended for showing remorse and was sentenced to four years. As Liban's family say, the murderer got four years, Liban and his family got a life sentence.

July 1999 Harold McGowan was found hanged in Telford, Shropshire. Police, having previously ignored his reports of a campaign of racist abuse and death threats, insisted that he had committed suicide. His family began their own inquiries, led by his nephew Jason McGowan.

On 1 January 2000 Jason was found hanged by the side of the road. The police said that there was no evidence of foul play. Media interest in the case has since pushed West Mercia police to reinvestigate, but no one has been charged. The family has complained to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) that police racism has hampered the investigation into both deaths. The police are now linking these deaths to the hanging of Akofa Hodasi in Surrey in April 1998 after a similar racist campaign against him. At the time, Surrey police concluded that his death, too, was suicide and took three weeks to interview four white men named by Akofa's family.

July 1999 Joseph Alcandor died after being punched in the head in

After the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Britain is as racist as ever

The police, championed by the right-wing press, have responded to Macpherson by adopting a siege mentality. They talk of a loss of morale, of nervous breakdowns suffered by police officers, of the Metropolitan police undergoing a 'period of grieving'. Macpherson's response was acerbic: 'The Lawrences grieve and they will never stop grieving because they have lost their son. A police force doesn't grieve. The police force has been castigated... they've got to get over it. They've got to get on with it.' The police have done anything but. Despite *The Telegraph* marking the anniversary of the report by accusing Macpherson of having 'blood on his

hands' because the police did not dare stop and search for fear of being branded racist, the truth is that black people are nearly eight times more likely to be stopped and searched and four times more likely to be arrested than white people. Despite the report's recommendations that more 'ethnic minority' officers should be recruited into the police force, non-white officers still make up only 2% of the police force nationally and 3.4% in London. Of those who do join, half as many again resign within five years, unable, presumably, to tolerate the racism and bullying that pervade the force. Of the 203 complaints about racist officers made to the Police Complaints Authority during 1998-

1999, only three were heard by a tribunal. Five officers were 'admonished'. And the racism spreads beyond the police to the judiciary, with black people between four and seven times more likely to be sentenced to prison terms than white people.

The problem remains that the Lawrence Inquiry, however well-meaning, cannot tackle police racism because it cannot identify the root cause - the racist British state. In a

This page was compiled by Hannah Caffer, Susan Davidson, Nicki Jameson and Cat Wiener

society where black children are six times more likely to be expelled or suspended from school than their British counterparts, black people face unemployment rates nearly three times those of whites and, on average, Caribbean and African men earn only two-thirds of the salary of their white peers, what are the police other than the armed guardians of this racist state?

Meanwhile, ever-tighter immigration and asylum laws are brought in under cover of a sickening cacophony of rabid, racist press and government propaganda. Small wonder, then, that in such a climate, racist attacks are on the rise, unchecked by police or state.



Eastern European asylum seekers have become the targets for racism

at attacks

London. The police had to be reminded by Joseph's family to interview two Asian men who had been attacked the same night by the same man.

September 1999 Ben Kamanaligi was murdered in Salford by four men. There was a month delay in releasing the details of the murder. One man was arrested in January.

October 1999 A Zairean student was stabbed in north London by five white youths. Four men were arrested and then released. No one has been charged.

December 1999 Eight white men attacked five waiters in the New Diamond restaurant in Chinatown, London. The waiters, who defended themselves, were arrested by the police. The attackers were only later arrested after pressure from the Chinese community and no charges were brought against them. The waiters are out on police bail.

January 2000 Safaraz Najib and four friends were attacked by a group of white men in Leeds. Safaraz had his nose, right leg and ribs broken and suffered serious head injuries. On 14 March, two Leeds United footballers were charged with causing grievous bodily harm and affray. Leeds United manager said that he would not suspend the players while they were awaiting trial.

Meanwhile, the family of Ricky Reel continue their fight for justice. Ricky Reel was racially abused and killed in a west London in October 1997. Police took no action and, when Ricky's body was found in the river, claimed his death was accidental.

Michael Menson was set on fire in North London in January 1997. He died from his injuries and the police treated his death as suicide. It took his family three years to finally see the killers arrested and convicted of his murder.

Deaths in custody

Roger Sylvester died in January 1999 after a week on a life support machine. He was arrested outside his home, restrained by eight officers, collapsed on arrival at hospital and never regained consciousness. No



Stephen Lawrence: murdered by racists

information from a police investigation has been made available to the family. No police officers have been suspended. Roger's body has still not been released for burial.

Christopher Alder died in police custody in Hull in April 1998. Arrested for breach of the peace, he was unconscious on arrival at the police station and was left lying face down on the floor with his hands cuffed behind his back. A video record of the last 11 minutes of his life shows him lying face down, in severe respiratory distress. The breathing eventually stops. The police officers involved were suspended on full pay and it took the Crown Prosecution Service until October to charge five of them with 'misconduct in public office'. The family have had to fight for each stage of the process. Christopher's body can still not be released for burial. Meanwhile, the police officers put on 'desk duty' following the death of Sarah Thomas in Stoke Newington police station last August have been allowed back on full duty. No inquiry has been held into her death.

Since December 1999 there have been five more deaths in custody. Over the last four years, 81 black people have died in police custody or prison in England and Wales. Meanwhile, in the last year, the number of reported racist incidents has risen 86%.

British immigration policy - institutionalised racism

Home Secretary Jack Straw is plumbing new depths as he seeks to remove all obstacles to implementing a policy of zero tolerance towards refugees. In March, *The Independent* reported that Straw would be calling for a fundamental review of the United Nations Convention on Refugees. Despite the introduction of one vicious asylum and immigration law after another over the past 30 years, the 1951 Convention, signed by 120 countries, has continued to provide some protection to asylum-seekers who could prove that they had a 'well-founded fear of persecution' in the country they were fleeing. Of course, it has not been easy proving this to a racist system, which is determined to exclude 'economic refugees' and refuses to recognise marks of torture or accept that regimes with which it has friendly relations are oppressive, but the structure for asylum claims exists.

Straw now seeks to redraft the Convention and as a first step will ask the European Union to agree new guidelines on its interpretation to exclude hijackers, anyone paying to enter a country illegally, or anyone arriving via a third country, even one travelled through to reach a planned destination.

Although some of the 'liberals' Straw bemoans will doubtless lament the watering down of the Convention, there is unlikely to be serious opposition to this or any other attempt to tighten border controls. In a deal with Britain, French immigration officers have begun patrolling Eurostar trains and a torrent of media filth is currently being unleashed against East European asylum-seekers in particular.

The last 20 years have seen a massive rise in the number of refugees worldwide - from 2.5 million to 20 million. Western European countries are desperate to ensure that the vast majority go only to neighbouring countries and do not trouble the affluent nations. However a sizeable number of today's refugees come from countries very near at hand.

Thus the borders of Fortress Europe are being strengthened to keep at bay not only immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America, but also those fleeing conflict in Europe itself. There are one million refugees from the NATO-driven conflict in Kosovo alone. Within Fortress Europe, Britain seeks, as always, to accommodate as few as possible of those asylum-seekers who do get into the EU. The 'soft touch' is a complete myth, propounded loudest by Shadow Home Secretary Ann Widdecombe to attack the Labour government.

'Any talk of eradicating institutionalised racism in Britain cannot begin to be taken seriously while would-be immigrants are excluded, hounded and deported and are treated as pariahs and criminals.'

Labour is not soft on refugees at all. In 1999 71,160 asylum-seekers came to Britain; of the 32,900 cases decided, 36% were granted refugee status and 11% exceptional leave to remain. Labour's contempt for refugees from oppressive regimes was clearly demonstrated by its treatment of Afghans claiming asylum following the recent hijacking in which an internal flight was diverted to Britain. Jack Straw announced that he would personally oversee all asylum claims and would ensure those making them were deported as swiftly as possible. As a disgusted official interpreter told Channel 4 News, immigration officers then harangued the Afghans into withdrawing their applications and, when those who had done so were on the plane home, they cheered loudly and went to the pub to celebrate.

In March 2000 Oakington Detention Centre opened. Run by Group 4, who already manage Campfield House, Oakington will increase government capacity to imprison would-be immigrants by 400. Britain

already detains up to 1,000 asylum-seekers at any one time.

In advance of the implementation of the relevant section of the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act, asylum-seekers are already being 'dispersed' among local authorities across the country, cut off from all community support and housed in appalling conditions. The full dispersal programme comes into force on 1 April, as does the system of replacing cash benefits with food vouchers.

Sodexho Pass, a French company already running a voucher system for asylum-seekers in Germany, and which will be running the British scheme, has openly touted for 'trading partners' by advertising the potential to short-change refugees: 'Vouchers cannot be exchanged for cash. Change should not be given, eg if goods to the value of £4.50 are purchased with a £5 voucher the 50p change should not be handed back, but you as a Trading Partner will receive the full £5 value for that voucher'. How low can you get?

Given that even prior to the mass introduction of the voucher scheme, people claiming asylum at the port of entry have only been entitled to claim 90% of income support (£48 per week) per adult, plus housing benefit, it is hardly surprising that some end up begging on the streets. But these, mainly Romany, migrants are being vilified in language reminiscent of propaganda from 1930s Germany, with the media, parliament and the courts all playing their part. With Ann Widdecombe calling for mass internment of asylum-seekers 'before they get a chance to go on to the streets to beg' and even the more restrained newspapers talking of a 'growing army of beggars', the scene is set for anyone who perpetrates physical attacks on East European asylum-seekers to do so with impunity.

Any talk of eradicating institutionalised racism in Britain cannot begin to be taken seriously while would-be immigrants are excluded, hounded and deported and are treated as pariahs and criminals.

People against multinational corporations

Multinational corporations dominate every aspect of our lives. They are the driving force of globalisation, masters of the economies of imperialist powers, super-exploiters of the underdeveloped nations, the furnishers of lifestyles and increasingly the determinants of art and culture the world over. They are among the most powerful political forces of our time. How has this happened and how is it being combated? DAVID YAFFE discusses a new and inspiring book *No Logo* by Naomi Klein.¹ Its central and simple message is that as more people discover the secrets behind the brand names of multinational corporations, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement.

The book's conclusion is based on a detailed examination of the largely underground movement of information, ideas, planning and protest across many countries and several generations of activists: a movement that was dramatically highlighted on 15 June 1999, at the time of the G-8 summit in Cologne, Germany, by simultaneous protest and action in some seventy cities worldwide, in what was called a 'global carnival against capital'. A coalition of groups, including Reclaim the Streets and People's Global Action, held protests and street parties around the world in financial districts, outside stock exchanges, banks, supermarkets and multinational headquarters. They displayed, says Naomi Klein, 'all of the movement's promise and creativity' – and showed more forcefully than ever before just how much anti-corporate rage is brewing' (p444). The book was written before the battles on the streets of Seattle during the World Trade Organisation summit in November/December 1999.²

How multinationals came to dominate our lives

A branded world

Naomi Klein argues that the astronomical growth of the wealth and cultural influence of multinational companies over the last 15 years can be traced back to an idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: 'successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products' (p3). Their real work, it was said, lay in marketing and not manufacturing things. Corporations had to concentrate their resources on building up their brand through sponsorships, advertising, packaging, innovation and expansion. They should buy products and brand them and spend on synergies – buying up distribution and retail networks – to get their brands to as wide a market as possible. The brand image is primary, the product secondary. Manufacture should be farmed out of the home country to contractors and subcontractors who will have the problem of fulfilling orders on time and within budget, ideally in underdeveloped countries where labour is cheap, unions and labour laws are

non-existent and long tax holidays are available. Many companies now bypass production completely. Phil Knight, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Nike sums up their topsyturvy rationale: 'There is no value in making things any more. The value is added by careful research, by innovation and marketing' (p197). Competition, therefore, comes down to a fierce battle between brands not products.

Advertising, says Naomi Klein, changes its function in this branded world. Instead of delivering 'product news bulletins' it has to build 'an image around a particular brand name version of the product' (p6). As a consequence, advertising expenditure has risen dramatically. US spending in 1998 at \$196.5bn was nearly four times that of 1979. Global spending reached \$435bn in 1996, up sevenfold since 1950, growing a third faster than the world economy. If all forms of marketing are included, the figure for global spending approaches a staggering \$1 trillion.³ Little wonder that brands are expensive. Philip Morris paid \$12.6bn for the multinational Kraft in 1988, six times its paper value because of its brand name (p7).

Marketing, advertising, and buying up brands, however, produce no value – a point Phil Knight cannot grasp and *No Logo* fails to make. They are paid for out of the super-exploitation of the factory workers who actually produce the products. That is why companies can no longer accept a traditional mark-up of 100% between the cost of factory production and the retail price but have been scouring the world for factories where costs are so low that the mark-up is closer to 400% or greater, with the wages of the factory workers, the real producers of the wealth, constituting an ever-shrinking slice of corporate budgets. Branding, as Naomi Klein correctly states, is indeed hogging all the 'value added' (p197) together with, we should add, the obscene salaries of the corporate executives and the spiralling costs of their marketing personnel.

Behind the facade – super-exploitation

A great part of production for most multinational corporations is outsourced to contractors in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Asia and South America. There are around 1,000 EPZs in the world employing some 27m workers. The largest zone economy is China with some 18m people working in 124 EPZs. Naomi Klein visited some of these zones and vividly describes the barbaric conditions imposed on the workers, most of them young women. Cavite Export Processing Zone, the largest of the 52 EPZs in the Philippines, is typical. She calls it a 'branding

broom closet'. It employs around 50,000 workers. It is a 682 acre walled-in industrial area containing 207 factories that produce only for the export market. Inside the gates workers assemble finished products for Nike running shoes, Gap pyjamas, IBM computer screens and Old Navy jeans. The factories are anonymous windowless workshops crammed next to each other only feet apart. You need to get inside the 'unbranded' workshops to know what is being assembled, often different branded goods side by side, and to see the 'lines of young women hunched in silence over clattering machines'. The workday is long often 12 hours or more, the management military style, the supervisors often abusive, the wages are below subsistence and the low-skill work is tedious (p202ff).

And temporary jobs

At the same time that multinational corporations are outsourcing production to underdeveloped countries, they are also reorganising their operations and cutting down their costs in their major markets in the imperialist countries. To do this they employ a fluid reserve of part-timers, temps and freelancers or even contract out the work to job agencies to keep their overheads down and respond to the upturns and downturns of the market. Wal-Mart, Starbucks, McDonalds, Kmart and the Gap to name a few have been lowering workplace standards in the service sector to fuel their marketing budgets and expansion. Starbucks is typical. It has a software programme to ensure staff are employed only at the times needed, causing havoc with employees' lives. Wal-Mart has a similar policy. Barely any of the part-time staff earn a living wage. This, then, is the brutal reality behind the 'cool' facade of the multinational brands.

Neo-liberalism opened the way

It is one thing to create brands but quite another for multinational companies to infiltrate them into every aspect of our lives, furnishing lifestyles, and becoming determinants of our art and culture. *No Logo* points to the political and economic decisions which shaped this process. It would not have been possible without neo-liberalism, the deregulation and privatisation policies of nearly three decades, during which corporate and other taxes were dramatically lowered and the public sector was starved of adequate funding. As government spending fell, universities, schools, museums, broadcasting media and other public services became ripe for partnerships with private corporations. The ideological assault on the public sector – the presumption of its inescapable,

bureaucratic inefficiency and wastefulness – that heralded the collapse of Keynesianism from the mid-1970s onwards accelerated this process.⁴ What began as sponsorship, a replacement of public funding, soon turned into a highly effective marketing tool (p34).

No Logo is full of examples of multinational corporations marketing their brands through their infiltration of previously non-commercialised public space. Corporate access to education facing chronic underfunding was made easy through the equation with modern technology. Free computers are supplied to schools in partnership with local businesses. Inadequately funded music and sports facilities and student cafeterias allow fast-food chains such as Pizza Hut and McDonalds, drink multinationals such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi and sports gear companies such as Nike to fill the gap. TV companies are allowed to promote their own compulsory current affairs programmes, inclusive of adverts, to young chil-

dren in exchange for use of their audiovisual equipment.

Corporations often make secret deals with universities preventing them 'disparaging' their brand. At Kent State University where Coca-Cola have exclusive vending rights, a Free Nigeria Movement speaker was denied funding by the student council because negative comments about Coca-Cola's business in Nigeria would be made. Corporate research partnerships at North American universities are used for everything from designing new Nike skates, developing more efficient oil extraction techniques for Shell, assessing the Asian market's stability for Disney and measuring the relative merits of brand compared to generic drugs. Publication of information critical of the corporate sponsor is often blocked or delayed to avoid losing sponsorship money (pp98-101). For example, at the University of California, Boots commissioned research hoping to show its high priced thyroid drug was more effective than a cheaper generic competitor. The results showed that was not the case. Boots successfully halted the publication of the research with the backing of the University. The results were finally published two years later after the matter was exposed in *The Wall Street Journal* (p99). Similar developments are taking place all over the world.

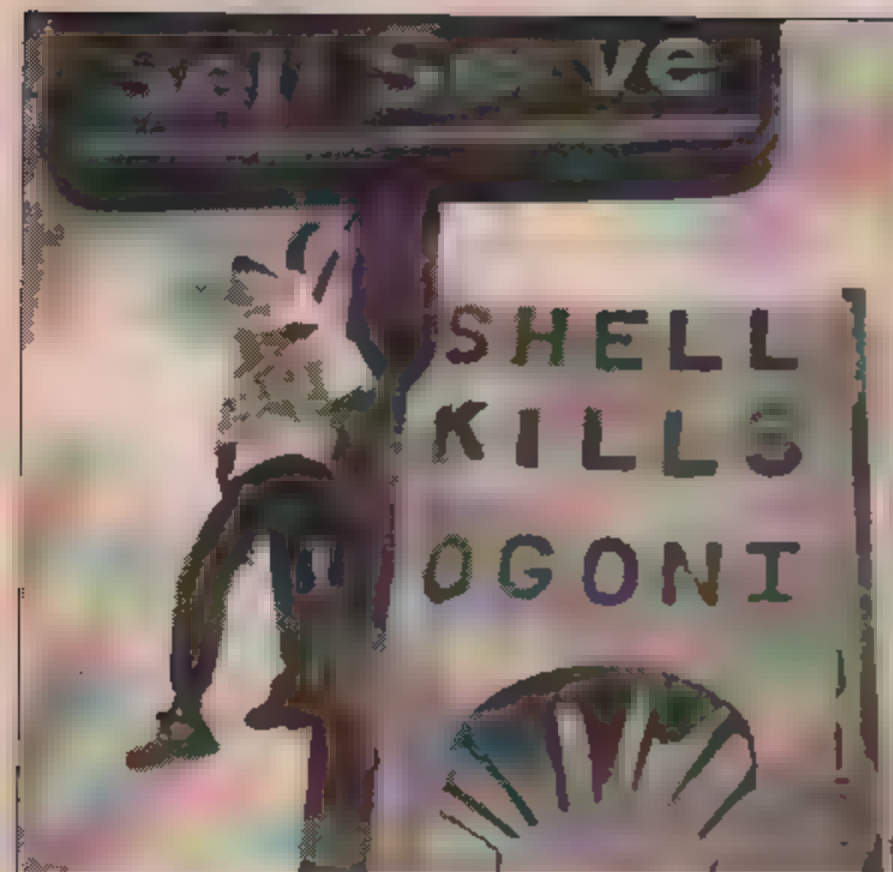
Co-opting style, creating lifestyles

'Cool' is a major selling factor and multinationals hire 'cool hunters' to search out the styles and attitudes finding favour in the perennial teenage markets, utilising peer pressure as a powerful marketing force. *No Logo* shows how multinational feed off the alienation at the heart of US race relations: 'selling white youth on their fetishisation of black style, and black youth on their fetishisation of white wealth' (p76). Nike borrows style from black urban youth – its marketers and designers send their prototypes to inner city neighbourhoods to check out the reaction and to create a buzz. They have a word for the practice 'bro-ing' from 'hey, bro, check out the shoes'. Tommy Hilfiger also harnessed 'ghetto cool' in mass marketing the leisure-style clothes associated with skiing, golfing and boating, which poor and working class kids wore to acquire status on the inner city streets. Rap artists were supplied with free clothes to launch the styles.

Nothing is sacrosanct. The book is full of examples of how revolution and revolutionaries, the labour movement, anti-racism and feminism, alternative music and even anti-corporate campaigns can be co-opted to become 'cool' selling features of a multinational brand.

Revolution beer: branding to sell beer to young people





Fighting back

In May 1993 the Kader toy factory in Bangkok, Thai, burned to the ground killing 188 workers and injuring 489 more. The Kader women had been sewing toys for Toys 'R' Us. Yet few, says Naomi Klein, were prepared to make the connection between the burnt out building and the brand name toys flying North American and European homes. It took two more years before those connections began to be made by both the public and the media. 'They're getting our jobs, gave way to our corporations are stealing their lives' (p334). Today corporations face thousands of technology-competent, 'investigative activists' who are as globally connected as the corporations they track.

Nevertheless, argues Naomi Klein, opposition to the invasive advertising, the infiltration of public space and the monopolistic business practices of the multinational corporations behind the brands would have mounted to little more than run-of-the-mill cynicism had not these companies begun to close down factories and slash full-time jobs at home. She compares this to the last successful attack on advertising at the time of economic deprivation during the Great Depression in the 1930s. As with the attack on the brands today the adverts were attacked not for their faulty imagery as such but as the most public face of a deeply faulty economic system (p304). And she believes that it will be from the ranks of the millions of temporary workers with few ties and little loyalty to the corporate system, that the true breeding ground of the anti-corporate backlash will most likely be found (p269). These are important points which demand further discussion and development as the new political movement starts to be formed.

The last sections of the book discuss the creativity and tactics behind the many different campaigns against multinational companies and their brands from culture jamming - distorting and disfiguring the adverts - through anti-sweatshop campaigns to the McLibel trial. Reclaim the Streets to the global carnival against capital? Important points are drawn from the experience and will be of enormous value to activists involved in new campaigns.

Driving the new movement is disillusionment with the political process. Election of liberal or social democratic movements far from reversing neo-liberal trends over the last decade have found them catering even more directly to the whims of global corporations. Similarly attempts to regulate multinational corporations through the UN and other trade regulatory bodies have

been blocked at every turn (p341).

Over a five-year period, reports Klein, the three-person New York office of the National Labour Committee, using Greenpeace-style media tactics, did more to highlight the plight of sweatshop workers by exposing the brutal reality behind some of the most famous logos than the international trade union movement achieved in a century. Its points were simple and crushing and were designed for impact. Typical are the examples relating to the production of Nike running shoes in China and Disney pyjamas in Haiti. At the workers at the Nike Yue Yen factory in China would have to work nineteen years to earn what Nike spends on advertising in one year. Disney CEO Michael Eisner earns \$9 783 an hour, a Haitian worker earns 27 cents an hour. The plush living conditions of the dogs on the set of 101 Dalmatians - 'doggie condos' fitted with soft beds and heat lamps, cared for by on-call vets and served beef and chicken - should be compared with living conditions of Haitian workers: the malaria and dysentery-infected hovels, where they sleep on cots, and are rarely able to buy meat or go to the doctor. The slogans are backed by highly creative rallies and imaginative actions (pp350-352).

The international campaign against Nike really began to get to the Nike corporation when the black youth of the inner-cities got involved. Nike's branding power is thoroughly intertwined with black celebrities such as Michael Jordan, Spike Lee, Tiger Woods and Bo Jackson. To get the youth involved the connection had to be made between Nike's overseas operations and conditions at home. That connection was waiting to be made. The very youth who have been manipulated to give the Nike swoosh its cutting edge were the very people most hurt by the company's outrageous prices and the non-existent manufacturing jobs. A social worker sick of seeing kids wearing trainers they couldn't afford and which their family couldn't afford told them how Nike shoes were made. Workers in Indonesia are paid \$2 a day, and it costs Nike \$5 to make the shoes they bought for \$100 and \$180. Nike didn't make any shoes in the US, which is part of the reason their parents had a tough time finding work. The kids were especially angry at being taken for a ride and their campaign against Nike led to them dumping hundreds of their old Nike shoes at Nike towns in their area. This was filmed and broadcast. One of the young activists, a 13-year-old boy from the Bronx, spoke into a TV camera: 'Nike, we made you. We can break you.' Nike had been forced to send its chief of public relations to

listen to their demands: for a living wage for overseas workers with independent monitoring, for cheaper trainers, and for re-investment in the inner cities in the US. The dumping of the shoes was designed to force some action on those demands.

No Logo does point out the limitations of the anti-brand, anti-sweatshop campaigns and the dangers, all too evident, of the campaigns becoming glorified ethical shopping guides. Codes of conduct which the workers have no hand in drafting will have limited effectiveness. They can be taken on by multinational corporations, not to significantly change anything but to muzzle the offshore watchdog groups. Human rights are far from being protected by this process but are selectively respected when in the spotlight. Multinational corporations can and do simply up their operations and go elsewhere where costs are lower and they are less likely to be troubled. To be only able to take up workers' collective rights and struggles in the context of what people consume is a serious problem (p428).

The linking up of the activists in the anti-sweatshop movement with the workers in the factories and workshops in Export Processing Zones did give workers and their organisations more impetus to organise against their brutal conditions. And that is the only sure way forward as Nidas Barceñas, an organiser at the Workers' Assistance Centre at Cavite, told Naomi Klein: 'The more significant way to solve these problems lies with the workers themselves inside the factory' (p440).

No Logo can point to some recent important advances as rivalries between the social/political and ecological movements are overcome in the unified battle to attack the corporate enemy. So the United Food and Commercial Worker's Union which began a campaign against Wal-Mart because of low wages and union-busting tactics now collects and distributes information on Wal-Mart stores being built on sacred Native American burial grounds. The McLibel Two took up the struggle for McDonald's workers for a living wage and decent conditions. Reclaim the Streets supported the Liverpool dockers. The connections are gradually being made.

Naomi Klein's conclusion is a challenging one: 'Political solutions accountable to people and enforceable by their elected representatives deserve another shot before we throw in the towel and settle for corporate codes, independent monitors and privatisation of our collective rights as citizens'. Her book does not expand on such questions. Neither does she offer a theoretical framework to examine the likely developments within a crisis-ridden global capitalist system which will accelerate the process. In one sense the questions she raises inescapably lead to an issue that has been off the mainstream agenda since the collapse of the Soviet Union - of an alternative to the capitalist system and the fight for a real socialist society. In the meantime perhaps we should be grateful that such a substantial and inspiring book has been written about a new and alternative political movement.

1. Flamingo 2006 pp490 £14.99. All page numbers in italics.
2. For an analysis and eyewitness report see Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism (FRFI) 153 February/March 2005.
3. Figures on global advertising spending from the United Nations Human Development Report 1997 p63.
4. For a discussion of this development see David Yaffe 'The politics and economics of globalisation' in FRFI 137 June/July 1997.

Simon Jones campaign: Casualisation kills!



Demonstrators occupied the offices of Personnel Selection in Brighton and forced them to close for the day in memory of Simon

On 23 March, the High Court made legal history by ruling that the Crown Prosecution Service was wrong to refuse to bring a corporate manslaughter prosecution against employers Euromin in the case of Simon Jones.

Simon Jones was 24 when he was killed in April 1998 on his first day as a casual worker on Shoreham docks in Brighton. The dock office harassed him into taking any job on offer for fear of having his benefit stopped. He was sent to work unloading cargo, a skilled and dangerous job, after only a few minutes' training. Within hours, while hooking cobbles onto chains illegally welded to the inside of a crane's grab jaws (to save the company time and money) he was crushed to death when the grab accidentally closed on his head.

Simon's family have accused the Dutch-owned company Euromin and its general manager James Martell of 'sacrificing safety for profit' and want both to stand trial for manslaughter. But the CPS has twice refused to bring a manslaughter prosecution, arguing that there was insufficient evidence to prove gross negligence. The CPS has regularly blocked corporate manslaughter cases: over the last ten years, 3,500 workers have died in workplace incidents, at least 700 of these should have led to corporate manslaughter prosecutions but in fact there have been only two prosecutions, of tiny firms.

Simon got his job through an employment agency, Personnel Selection. Throughout the country, employment agencies make huge profits by providing workers to companies like Euromin, who prefer cheap, casual labour instead of a well trained, decently paid workforce. Meanwhile, the government-run Health and Safety Executive - ostensibly created to ensure safe working conditions - last year investigated only 11% of 47,000 major workplace injuries; only 10% ended in prosecution and penalties are, in any case, very low.

Casualisation equals low pay, with little or no training, no job security, no sick pay and no holiday pay, it is the hallmark of global capitalism: indeed its lifeblood, representing ever-bigger profits for companies - and more deaths and injuries for workers. The Labour government is determined to create a mass low-paid labour market in Britain in the interests of multinational corporations.

The court ruling is a victory for all those who have campaigned for justice for Simon Jones. From the beginning, his family and supporters have fought to ensure his death did not become just another 'workplace casualty' statistic. Foremost in the campaign has been the Brighton

based SchNews, a direct action weekly newsletter which Simon himself used to write for, which had already supported the Liverpool dockers in their struggle against casualisation. Campaigners have occupied Shoreham dock, unfurling banners from 80ft towers which read 'Simon Jones RIP' and 'Casualisation kills', forcing Euromin to close the



Simon Jones poster on the gates of the Shoreham docks where he died

docks down for the day. They occupied the Brighton office of Personnel Selection employment agency and hung a banner from the window reading 'Murderers' closed down the Department of Trade and Industry in London for an afternoon and closed down Southwark Bridge in the City of London. Their actions forced an admission from ministers that legislation to protect workers was inadequate. Environment Minister Michael Meacher said 'I am absolutely outraged that penalties that perhaps are as little as £2,500 which I certainly believe are derisory and insulting, are sometimes awarded in the case of death or serious injury. Now the court ruling offers a chance not just of justice for Simon Jones but of spreading further the message: casualisation kills'.

A film about the case has been made by Conscious Cinema. Video copies can be obtained for £5 from Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, PO Box 2600, Brighton, BN2 2DX.

318 PRISONERS

This is the current list of people imprisoned following the June 18 Carnival Against Capitalism last year. Please send them letters of support.

Sean Brown (BPS610), HMV Old Ashfield, Sherwood Road, Puckdechurch, Bristol, BS16 9LY

Jeff Booker (DN7071), HMP Elmley, Eastchurch, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 4QZ

Stuart Tokam (DN7072), HMP Brixton, Jebb Avenue, London, SW2 5XF

Thomas Wall (FF4431), HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead, London SE28 0EB

Khalid Bajwa (DN7230), HMP Brixton

Jon Barnett (FB5538), HMV Old Feltham, Bedford Road, Feltham, Middx, TW13 4ND

Cuba leads

One million people have been displaced by what is called a 'natural disaster' in Mozambique. In Bangladesh in 1998 two thirds of the country was flooded. Hurricane Mitch devastated much of Honduras in the same year. Orissa in India was flooded in 1999 and then coastal Venezuela ruined. Unprecedented storms lashed France last Christmas. Mother Nature is proving very fickle indeed.

The 1990s were the warmest decade on record. 1998 was the worst year ever for storm damage. The German insurance company Munich Re says that the frequency of 'natural disasters' has tripled since the 1960s. (See David Nicholson-Lord in *New Statesman* 6 March for an excellent summary of the political responses to global warming). Global warming provokes little more remark in the media than blithe comments on an early Spring or improved prospects for English vine growers. The Red Cross estimates that in 1998 'natural disasters' caused 58% of the world's refugees and that 'environmental refugees' exceeded the numbers of people displaced by wars. 32,000 people were killed by natural disasters in 1998, 60,000 in 1999.

Environmentalists are talking of a 'Nemesis effect' - sudden qualitative changes in conditions brought about by crossing critical thresholds. For example the vast forest fires now burning uncontrollably in Indonesia, sudden changes in ocean currents

caused by melting ice caps, the loss of entire fish species and the attendant food chain caused by destruction of coral reefs. Nemesis means retaliation, poetic justice, and punishment - nature avenging the blows inflicted on it by modern capitalism.

When did you hear Tony Blair make a speech on the dangers of global warming? Never! Instead we have Two Jags (and one Rover) Prescott as the role model in charge of transport.

Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolutionaries are serious analysts of what is happening in the world, they are not captives of spin-doctors striving to justify a status quo that heaps ruin on so many lives. In 1983 Castro and Cuba published *The world economic and social crisis - its impact on the underdeveloped countries, its sombre prospects and the need to struggle if we are to survive*. It is the most detailed analysis of almost all the concerns brought to Seattle and the World Trade Organisation 16 years later. Here Castro describes the catastrophe unfolding in the majority



The Cuban Revolution leads the fightback against globalisation

of poor nations in the world. The dependence on a few commodities - sugar, tea, copper, tin, bananas, coffee etc - whose prices kept falling and have fallen a further 45% since the book was written. Here is the unpayable, unbearable Third World debt which stood at \$70 billion in 1970, \$600 billion in 1982 and is now over four times that amount. Here are the multinational corporations that monopolise the world's markets. Here are the protectionist barriers used by the USA, western Europe and Japan to keep out Third World products.

Castro states: 'It is necessary to add man's actions on the environment, which are increasingly causing unprecedented changes in the stability, organisation, balance, interaction and even survival of the Earth's main ecological systems.' Here is detailed the deforestation, depletion of water

resources, now 60% of what they were in the 1970s, the pollution of the air and seas, the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, ozone depletion in the stratosphere. Here are the giant firms paying Third World workers one tenth of the wages that are paid in the metropolitan heartlands. Here are the 500 million who went to bed hungry each night. Now they are gone, to be replaced by a billion people in hunger today. Here are the monstrous arms expenditures used to keep humanity in this state of affairs. Arms expenditures that year after year benefit British capitalism almost as much as any other country in the world - excepting the USA.

For the 1992 Rio Summit on the environment Fidel Castro submitted *Tomorrow is too late* - development and the environmental crisis in the Third World. He states: 'Stop transferring to the Third World lifestyles and consumer habits that ruin the environment. Make human life more rational. Adopt a more just international economic order. Use science to achieve sustainable development without pollution. Pay the ecological debt instead of the foreign debt. Eradicate hunger and not humanity. Enough of selfishness. Enough of schemes of domination. Enough of insensitivity, irresponsibility and deceit. Tomorrow will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.' Castro concludes, 'Humanity can still stop and reverse the destruction of the environment. It nevertheless seems appropriate to ask how much time it has to do so. If present trends continue, in 40 years the Earth's population will have doubled, the climate will have suffered deep and irreversible changes, the tropical rain forests will have practically disappeared, immense deserts, sterile and degraded lands will have replaced a large part of the lands that are now used for crops and livestock raising; clean water will be very hard or impossible to find in entire regions; and hunger will spread uncontrollably and irremediably.'

Cuba does not just analyse the world but it acts. Cuba led in the campaign to cancel Third World debt; Cuban volunteers provide more doctors and teachers to the poor nations than any other country in the world and Cuban soldiers broke the teeth of the apartheid South African Defence Force in Angola. Who better to be at Seattle, who better to be with the demonstrators in the streets and the representatives of the poor nations in the conference hall, op-

posing the plunder of the world by the giant multinationals, leading the fight against globalisation than Fidel Castro and the Cuban government? That is why the US authorities conspired to prevent Castro attending: they were afraid of him, afraid of Cuba and the love the poor and struggling people of the world have for Cuba. That is why Fidel Castro could not come to Seattle: they were afraid of Cuba's moral and political power.

When we looked at the riot police attacking the demonstrators in Seattle, we saw a country that goes more of its people than any other country in the world. The USA spends more on private police forces than on the public police force. 28 million US citizens live in privately guarded, walled and electronically fenced communities, fortresses where the elite hide their wealth.

FRFI says that globalisation is an expression of capitalist crisis. Its features are: 1) A huge increase in the export of capital. Last year Britain invested more abroad than any other country in the world. 2) Growing monopolisation through mergers and take-overs and the dominance of the multinational corporations. Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank have agreed to merge. Their combined assets exceed \$1.25 trillion, about the size of the British economy. Monopolisation means these corporations control ever more aspects of our lives. An example: Deutsche Bank owns 48,000 works of art. Its London offices have meeting rooms named after the illustrious artists whose works are displayed on the walls. There is the Hockney Room, the Bacon Room and Freud Room. The entrance hall is decorated with Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread and Anish Kapoor. Such is the destiny of modern art - to get a meeting room of your own in the palaces of these latter-day Medicis. 3) The unprecedented autonomy of the financial system from real production: the \$3 trillion a day speculated in financial casinos, where the click of a mouse can send the Asian Tigers into depression. 4) Cuts in state welfare now directed against so-called 'dole cheats' in an attack that threatens to criminalise millions of people in Britain. 5) The dramatic rise in the exploitation of labour and intensity of work. Beneath the US boom are wages barely above their 1970s' levels. The average working year is now a month longer than it was in the 1970s and there is the army of 600,000 to one million and more undocumented, illegal Hispanic work-



Elian US corruption and conspiracy

On 21 March, a federal court hearing in Florida ruled that the fate of Elian Gonzalez should be decided by the attorney general Janet Reno. The ruling of the federal court is a victory for international law and natural justice. Judge Michael Moore lamented the fact that 'Each passing day is another day lost between Juan Gonzalez and his son. The court can only hope that those on each side of this litigation place the interests of Elian Gonzalez above all others.'

The six-year-old Cuban boy was hijacked by distant Miami-based relatives after his mother and stepfather drowned trying to reach the United States illegally by raft. Janet Reno had already in January approved the findings of the US Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) that the usual international procedure should be followed in Elian's case and he should be returned to the custody of his nearest relative, his father Juan Gonzalez, in Cuba.

But the murky dealings and con-

spiracy organised by Elian's Miami-based relatives and their powerful, counter-revolutionary backers in the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) have shown them to have anything but Elian's best interests at heart.

Despite the INS ruling in January, Elian's great-uncle - a sordid character with a history of child abuse and alcoholism - was in February awarded temporary custody of the child by elected Florida judge Rosa Rodriguez, who had direct links to both the family and to CANF. In the latest hearing, the original presiding judge, Michael Chavies, was forced to stand down after his links to the campaign to keep Elian in the United States were discovered. And there seems little doubt that CANF is deeply implicated in the recent attempt to discredit the role of the INS by accusing one of its officials of espionage in collaboration with the Cuban vice-consul at the Cuban Interests Section in Washington. Jose Imperatori, Imperatori was arrested by the FBI and deported to Canada. He has gone on hunger-strike to clear his name, the reputation of the Cuban Interests Section and that of the INS and is quite clear that this is a set-up designed to cast doubt on the INS ruling. The Miami relatives now plan to appeal against the court ruling.

If, as seems likely, the decision is referred to the supreme court, the whole process will take many months - months which the counter-revolutionaries of Miami, US politicians and the right-wing media will exploit to the full in their efforts to denigrate Cuba. Both presidential candidates, vying for the key Florida seat, will be anxious to delay any decision until after the elections in October. Republican candidate George W. Bush responded to the court ruling with an immediate demand that Janet Reno reconsider her decision. US Today printed a front-page article highlighting the 'poverty' of Cuban children -

one of the family's key points is how much better a future awaits Elian in the United States. The article described a group of Cuban children playing with makeshift toys in the street: 'no rollerblades, no Game Boys, no Pokemon cards' it lamented. No crack, no Smith & Wessons, no switchblades either, it could perhaps have continued. What deprivation. 'Do not return Elian to the country his mother died trying to flee!' scream other headlines. In fact, all the evidence shows that Elian's mother was coerced onto the raft by her violent and abusive partner.

Meanwhile, in Cuba, mass demonstrations continue for Elian's return. Fidel Castro has emphasised that the campaign for Elian's return is now about far more than one child's fate and needs to become a campaign against the notorious US Cuban Adjustment Act which, by granting immediate residence rights to any Cuban arriving in the United States by illegal means, has lured literally thousands to their deaths in the shark-infested waters of the Florida Straits.

Cal Wiener

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE



Fifth Brigade heads for Guantanamo

Rock around the Blockade is gearing up for its fifth brigade to Cuba in April. While the campaign is busy raising the final sums needed to reach our £5,000 total to buy equipment for a mobile disco in the province of Guantanamo the brigadistas who will inaugurate the sound system within sight of the infamous US naval base in the province are preparing for two weeks soaking up the sun, sea, salsa and socialism of this revolutionary island.

The brigade breaks new ground this year, heading down south to Guantanamo City and then on to the mountains of Baracoa. While in Guar-

The 1998 brigade in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba

ers fleeing the ravages of Mexico and Central America. 6) Growing mass unemployment and poverty.

Mozambique

Mozambique now joins the ever 80 countries whose incomes are going backwards. People in Britain in 1820 had incomes per head on average six times those of people in Mozambique today. Their homes were washed away like sticks in a river. Mozambique is a country of 19 million people whose foreign debt is about double its national income of \$4.5 billion. If that debt were to be paid –

and it cannot be paid – debt service payments would amount to 83% of government revenues. Three quarters of Mozambique's women are illiterate, as are half the men. Life expectancy is 45 years and two thirds of the people do not have access to safe drinking water. Infant mortality is 130 per 1,000 live births. There is a disaster every day of these people's lives.

One medium-sized British multinational that exports molasses from Mozambique, Tate and Lyle (founded by Sir Henry Tate who also founded the Tate Gallery), has annual sales 50% greater than Mozambique's

bique. A market researcher explains the growth in male toiletry sales: 'The vanity barriers traditionally attached to being a "bloke" have diminished as the materialistic attitude to life has made appearance more important.' The brand leader is Faberge, owned by Unilever, which sells its products in Mozambique, imposing reckless wants on Third World people.

So there we have it: globalisation means we can fly molasses, cut flows and mangetout daily from East Africa to London, but it took over a week to send four helicopters in the other direction to Mozambique, as

Cuban economy continues to grow

TREVOR RAYNE

Cuba achieved a 6.2% growth in national output during 1999. Average annual economic growth for the past five years is 4%, well above the regional average. The Special Period brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the US blockade is not over, but the Cuban economy is returning to its pre-1989/91 capacity. This is a terrific feat when all of the former socialist states except Poland have gone backwards in terms of output.

Cuba's infant mortality rate has continued to fall during the Special Period. In 1999 it was 6.4 per 1,000 live births, down from 7.1 in 1998. This achievement is bettered by no other developing nation in the world and is surpassed by only a few of the richest nations. It is better than that of the USA. It is testimony to the socialist priorities that govern Cuba's resources.

Increases in oil and natural gas production allow Cuba to generate 41% of its electricity from domestic fuels. Agricultural output grew 15.1% in 1999 and the fish catch is up 7%. The sugar harvest rose from 3.78 million tonnes in 1998/99 to over 4.3 million tonnes in 1999/2000.

There were 374 joint ventures underway with foreign companies in February this year. 58 new ventures were authorised in 1999 and 57% of the total have been finalised since the USA passed the 1996 Helms-Burton Act to try and stop foreign investment in Cuba. Joint ventures have financed the building of 3,443 hotel rooms, with another 1,937 to be built and 8,436 at the project stage. Current capacity is 32,000 rooms but this is intended to increase to over 60,000 in the next five years. By 2010 it is anticipated that Cuba will receive more than seven million tourists a year producing revenues of \$11.8 billion compared with \$2.1 billion in 1999.

Francisco Soberon, president of the Cuban Central Bank, said on 14 February that the economic situation was now 'under control' and that one of Cuba's main successes was to have diversified the economy. Improved government finances meant that workers in education, health, the media, police and judiciary had pay rises. Nevertheless, Soberon said that there were 'specific problems that require a lot of attention and effort', among these being Cuba's \$11 billion foreign debt and the cost of credit, given the US blockade.

While agricultural production is up it is still inadequate to meet Cuba's needs. State rationing with subsidised prices is necessary to ensure that all have adequate calories and protein. Milk and grain production are below

targets and this results in the use of hard currency earnings on imports. Part of the problem is the decay in the agricultural infrastructure (roads, equipment, water supplies and other inputs) during the Special Period, but Vice President Carlos Lage points to administrative and organisational factors playing a role. He suggests as a general policy that devolving more responsibility to productive units is responsible for some of the improvement in the economy. There should be higher incentives for production and income should be linked to output. In agriculture this means encouraging farmers on smaller plots of land. Lage refers to a policy of decentralisation without abandoning planning.

Cuba's economic successes played their part in attracting 2,000 companies from 70 countries to the annual Havana trade fair, the largest number since it started in 1983. Cuba won the 1999 Saving Dry Lands prize from the UN Environmental Programme for its efforts to combat desertification in Guantanamo province and restoration of coastal lands in Antonio del Sur, the driest part of Cuba. 3,140 Cuban medical personnel served 58 countries in 1999, while Cuba provided free medical education to 1,913 students from 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The USA has responded by continuing to try and force the Spanish hotel group Sol Melia to withdraw from Cuba. The firm has refused to abandon its 14 hotels on the island. The US Agency for International Development has had its 2000 budget increased by the US government from \$2.2 million in 1999 to \$3 million. This agency funds US groups seeking to overthrow the Revolution. In November the Miami anti-Cuban Radio Marti doubled its transmission power to 100 kW, attempting to overcome Cuban jamming.

The Cuban Revolution has the problem of how to mitigate the effects of the US blockade. Additionally, it has the problem of how to maintain growth without succumbing to the emergence of would-be capitalist elements in society. In the Special Period, the encouragement of tourism, foreign investment and joint ventures, the introduction of farmers' markets and small private enterprises were viewed as regrettable necessities – not as virtues. They would help to maintain the gains of socialism. However, they change the relations of production in Cuba and inevitably generate capitalist attitudes and aspirations. These have to be recognised as such, challenged and overcome. Thus far the Cuban working class and socialists are succeeding and the hardships of a few years ago are receding.



It took Britain over a week to send just four helicopters to help in Mozambique



Poor nations depend on selling commodities like tea whose prices keep falling

economy. Tate and Lyle's directors include directors of the Bank of England, GKN, Daimler Chrysler, Lonrho, the Northern Ireland Development Board, Equitable Life Assurance, Dresdner Kleinwort Benson, BCE (Canada's biggest telecommunications company), Unilever, the LIFFE and the Royal Opera House. These are members of a ruling class responsible for the condition of Mozambique today, having backed the apartheid regime in its 14 years proxy war to destroy Mozambican independence.

About 40% of Mozambique's budget is made up of aid. The British government has said that it will provide £5.8 million over two years to help Mozambique recover from the floods. This is exactly one hundredth what is now spent on male toiletries in Britain each year. More is spent on male hair colourants than the government is sending in aid to Mozam-

government ministries haggled over the bill of £2 million or £1 million.

Danger signals of the destructiveness of capitalism on the environment have been flashing for over 40 years. Just when capitalism should be jamming on the brakes it pushes down harder on the accelerator. We are travelling at 100 miles per hour down a dead-end street. Millions of people the world over oppose the subordination of science to weapons production and profits. We oppose the subordination of media and communications to marketing and sales. We oppose the subordination of the planet to multinational corporations and production for profits. That is why we say Cuba leads and we fight with her.

This is an edited version of a speech given by TREVOR RAYNE at Rock around the Blockade's Boycott Bacardi! Smash the US Blockade! dayschool on 11 March.

ties relating to health and education in Cuba can possibly be achieved in a relatively poor country.

In Baracoa, we will be taking the mobile disco to as many local communities as possible and working alongside Cuban students in a chocolate factory! We hope also to have the opportunity to sweat it out with some agricultural work. Most people in Britain have no contact with the process that brings us the food we eat, and this would be a chance to learn how important and rewarding agricultural work can be.

Helen

What are the brigadistas hoping to get from the experience?

'I am really interested in the Pioneers and the UJC. I am interested in how young people are organised, whether it is imposed from above and how grass roots it is. There is lots of talk in this country about how young people

are disenfranchised and apathetic, so I want to hear what the young Cubans feel about the revolution and their way of life.'

Hannah Bayman, London

'I want to see economic planning in practice, and how a socialist society functions. I want to learn about Cuban people's attitude towards work. I want to see to what extent prejudice, sexism and racism have been eradicated. I want to hear how Cuban people see their place and their role in the world.'

Barnaby Tasker, Bristol

'I believe for socialists it is imperative to learn the ongoing lessons of the Cuban Revolution. The work we are doing in solidarity with Cuba forces people to take sides – do we stand with socialism or imperialism? Our experience on the brigade must be turned into a weapon, in order to build a socialist movement in this country to defeat imperialism and its lackeys.'

Paul McKenna, Strathclyde



FRFI

-Fighting capitalist lies

EVENTS

LONDON

Public meeting Thursday 11 May
Simon Jones: Casualisation kills
 Queen's Head pub, Acton Street, WC1
 (Discussing the King's Cross / Islington
 area and a new video about the
 area) Simon Jones

Northwest
PRESTON

FRFI Readers' Group next meeting:
 19 April, 7.30pm at The Swaney Arms,
 Lancaster Road, 7.30pm

MANCHESTER

For information on meetings, contact
 fightpov@freethetname.co.uk

Midlands

For details of meetings in Birmingham,
 Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and
 Coventry, contact 029 7037 1030 or
 email revcom@talk21.com or write to
 FRFI, PO Box 22, Alford, Lincolnshire

RCG supporters in London have been attending meetings organised by the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) which is standing candidates for a number of seats in the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Its candidates range from SWP supporters such as Paul Foot and Mark Steel to Jim Stanley, brother of Harry Stanley who was shot and murdered by the Met in Hackney in September 1999. The question is: what does the LSA represent, and should socialists support it in the elections on 4 May?

As our comrades have found, pinning down what the LSA stands for is a little difficult. With an individual like

Jim Stanley it is straightforward. He is campaigning against police brutality and racism and making common cause with many other struggles. He is an authentic voice of working class opposition to Labour, and any decent socialist would support his election. Yet the LSA is also made up of political organisations which have an atrocious record in relation to Labour. The SWP, for instance, along with most of the rest of the left, told us to vote Labour in the 1997 general election, despite the fact that Blair had promised more racism, more attacks on the working class, more cuts in state welfare and more attacks on democratic rights. Now they are singing to a different tune. Or are they? Are they really going to break with Labour and organise against it?

Reading LSA leaflets and listening to their speakers gives a very different impression. They say 'we are going to build the alternative to Blair's New Labour Project'. The talk is constantly of this 'alternative'. The word 'opposition' does not feature at all. They concentrate their fire on 'New Labour', and give their implicit approval to Old Labour. Hence they support Ken Livingstone for mayor even though they complain he is not standing on a socialist platform. They ignore the fact that his differences with Blair are pretty insignificant, and have decided to overlook his support for the war against Yugoslavia. The conclusion must be that the LSA as a whole is not a movement which represents a fundamental break with Labour.

More recently, *Socialist Worker* appears to have struck a more radical pose. It says Labour 'has squandered the good will that it had less than three years ago', and that now 'is the time to break from Labour'. The party cannot be changed into a vehicle for genuine socialist change' (*Socialist Worker* 11 March 2000). It continues: 'socialists everywhere can build local campaigns



against the effects of New Labour's pro-market policies'. Again, what does this mean? For instance, Livingstone has made it clear he is not going to campaign against Labour; he wants to be readmitted to the party. Surely the SWP should not support him for that reason if they really see the need to break from Labour? Or are they playing with words, trying to appear much more radical than they really are in practice? We have often said that the SWP and others on the left are completely tied to social democracy, and have refused to consistently organise against it. In a sense Livingstone has given them a lifeline: he enables them to appear to be fighting Labour without actually breaking with social democracy. If Livingstone is elected and is allowed back into the Labour Party, the SWP will have to explain how once more its illusions in social democracy have been betrayed.

In the meantime, we urge readers who are wondering whether to support any of the socialist candidates for the GLA to look at their records and make

up their own minds. There are undoubtedly some such as Jim Stanley who would be good to see as GLA members. As a political force, however, the LSA does not represent anything fundamentally new.

Elsewhere, FRFI sellers outside Celtic football ground report that Glasgow police continue their time-honoured sectarianism in harassing supporters of Irish freedom among

Celtic fans. An 11-year-old boy was recently denied entry to a match because he was carrying an Irish tricolour. Police removed the boy's shoes and held him for an hour. Police have abused other fans particularly during Celtic vs Rangers matches. Celtic themselves have endorsed this crusade since the struggle for Irish liberation does not quite fit their 'plc' corporate image.

FRFI Fighting Fund

Since we launched our fighting fund last issue we have managed to raise £550, over our target of £500. Thanks go to a number of supporters who raised the amount of their regular donations; to Manchester comrades who raised £60 from their second-hand bookstall; and London supporters who raised £200 with another bar night.

The campaign must continue. We are having to renegotiate the lease on our office, and the opening offer from the council is to double the rent. Once again we appeal to you our readers. There is only one newspaper on the left that maintains a consistent anti-imperialist and anti-Labour Party standpoint. **Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!** We need your support to help keep it going.

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Boycott Bacardi campaign continues to grow

The Boycott Bacardi campaign continues to grow and to find new allies. The February issue of *New Internationalist* gave Rock around the Blockade's campaign widespread publicity and over the last months, a number of pubs in London, Manchester and Bristol have decided to stop stocking the anti-Cuban Bacardi rum in favour of the authentic Cuban product, Havana Club. And, in Bristol, where activists wrote to Oxfam after they spotted a university rugby match co-sponsored by Bacardi and Oxfam, another victory. Oxfam wrote back explaining that they had not known of Bacardi's anti-Cuban record and, while it was too late to pull out of this event, would ensure Bacardi received no media coverage from it in Oxfam's press coverage and would not co-sponsor any events with Bacardi in future. Campaign vigilance and pressure produce results! Meanwhile, Bacardi bar busts in the centre of London, graffiti on Bacardi publicity in the northwest, stickering and leafleting all over the country continued, all building for Rock around the Blockade's national dayschool on 11 March, where activists from all over Britain gathered to discuss how we take the campaign forward.



Getting the message out on the streets: the next step

The dayschool was an opportunity for those already interested in defending Cuban socialism to hear Jose Antonio Fraguela, second secretary of the Cuban Embassy, give a history of US aggression against the island and answer questions. But it also provided an important forum for discussing how best to link up the current swell of opposition to globalisation and the excesses of capitalism with support for a country that stands against the brutal exploitation of the working class and oppressed - Cuba. The Boycott Bacardi campaign is key to this. Bacardi left Cuba and wants to destroy the Revolution precisely because socialism created conditions where it could no longer exploit sugar workers there for the sake of big profits. It is no accident that it relocated to countries such as Puerto Rico and Mexico, where working conditions are atrocious and wages pitiful. Our task is to put together all the information we can on Bacardi as a multinational today: what it pays its workers, what rights it offers them, the details of its funding of contra groups in countries like El Salvador and Nic-



aragua. Bacardi is part and parcel, not just of the US blockade against Cuba, but of a brutal, creeping globalisation that is throwing millions into poverty and despair. By the same token, Cuba represents the same struggle against capitalism that was fought out on the streets of Seattle last year: for human dignity, for an end to exploitation of humanity and of the planet, for the cancellation of the third world debt, for health, for education, for justice.



Get active, get involved

Discussion at the dayschool for future activities centred on 1 April and Rock around the Blockade's 'Don't be a Bacardi fool' day of action. Events will be organised in different cities around the country and include more Bacardi bar busts - demonstrating and leafletting outside so-called 'Cuban' theme bars that sell Bacardi while dressed as babs; hyposting and subverting Bacardi adverts; city centre stunts parodying Bacardi's boxing theme. We will also be building up for the 1 May demonstration against globalisation and multinational companies. And, in June, Bacardi plans its biggest ever UK event - a four-day salsa festival: it is up to us to plan our biggest ever intervention. So to get involved in any of these activities, phone the campaign on 020 7837 1688.

Defend socialist Cuba

Meanwhile, in the northwest, activists continue to hold successful stalls at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston and will be host-

ing a workshop on 'Alternative economies: the lessons of Cuba' at the Globalisation Dayschool in Manchester on 8 April organised by the March Day 2000 organising committee. On 1 April they plan to hit a prominent Cuban-themed bar in Manchester city centre - but costume de rigueur.

Comrades in the Midlands have held meetings on Cuba since the collapse of the Soviet Union and a public meeting in Lincoln entitled 'Cuba: a different set of priorities'. In the build-up for the March dayschool, stalls were held in Nottingham, Birmingham and Sheffield. Nottingham, the event coincided with a Bacardi promotion, with casual workers handing out Bacardi leaflets for a pittance; many of them were horrified to read our material about Bacardi's record. On 1 April comrades will be demonstrating at supermarkets stocking Bacardi in Nottingham, followed by action against a Cuban-themed club.

In Bristol, as well as targeting the Bacardi sponsored rugby match, activists have held stalls in Broadmead with a good response and phenomenal sales of FRFI. Someone the spoke to who was giving out free rum samples on a Bacardi promotion has now joined the campaign! Even the landlord of the pub where discussions were held after a meeting to build for the dayschool has pledged not to sell Bacardi! A major event, with comrades travelling from London, Brighton and Cardiff, being organised for 1 April. The Cuba society in Cardiff has held a public meeting on health in Cuba and will be holding a further meeting with a speaker from Cuba on 31 March. Meanwhile in London, comrades have made links with new group, Salsa Challenge Cuba, whose aim is to send young dancers out to learn salsa in Cuba, and we attended the Cuba Solidarity Campaign dayschool at the end of March. Our next campaign meeting on Monday 17 April, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC will commemorate the Cuban victory over US imperialism at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative - Join the RCG!

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LETTERS

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Failure of the Good Friday Agreement

The crisis and inherent failure of the Good Friday Agreement came to a head at the beginning of February when the British government implemented its Unionist agenda by suspending the institutions set up under the agreement. The IRA withdrew its previous offers to the decommissioning body. All deals were off and, as Gerry Adams put it, 'I can go no further'. The suspension of the partitionist assembly was an inevitable conclusion of a process which enshrines the Unionist veto over the Six Counties.

But what has occurred since then is of huge importance to all those who seek an end to British rule in Ireland. There are growing signs of Republican disillusionment with the progress of the political process. Brendan Hughes, who led the 1981 H-Block hunger strike, openly criticised the strategy of the Sinn Féin leadership and called on others to 'examine their consciences and speak out'. In an article in the new expressionist magazine *Fourthwrite*, he argues that Sinn Féin has been outmanoeuvred by the Unionists.

'The people are politics weary, not war weary'. The same old lies regurgitated week in, week out. With the war, politics had some substance. Now it has none. The political

process has created a class of professional liars and unfortunately it contains many Republicans.'

He criticised the Stormont Agreement: 'Overall, the facade has been cleaned up but the bone structure remains the same. The state we set out to smash still exists... I look at South Africa and I look at here and I see that the only changes have been in appearance. No real change has occurred. A few Republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind.'

Comments like these must concern the leadership of the Republican movement. It is not only the substance of what is being said but who is now saying it. Sinn Féin have recently, in the wake of the suspension of the agreement, called upon nationalists to mobilise and to call upon everyone to 'Make politics work'. That argument must be becoming increasingly difficult to win, particularly within the framework of the Good Friday agreement.

As we have argued throughout the 'peace process' in FRFI, the peace agreement will be judged by the nationalist working class on what happens in their estates and communities. There is no indication whatsoever anything has

dramatically changed. Recent statistics released by NIO official Adam Ingram, claims the number of killings in the Six Counties since May 1998 has reached a total of 49, with 2,422 people injured as a result of attacks between 10 April 1998 and 10 February this year. Unemployment figures for the nationalist working class are almost double those of Loyalist areas. Complaints against the RUC continue to rise along with their continued attempts to recruit informers.

The agreement does nothing to solve all these problems as it consolidates and strengthens British imperialism's grip. Britain has no right to expect the symptoms of the conflict to go away until it addresses the actual causes of that conflict - the sectarian statelet in the north of Ireland.

Any opposition to the agreement, whether from Republicans or fascist Loyalist terror groups, will face the might of Britain's secret war machine. Recently, at the opening of the anti-agreement Republican Sinn Féin Belfast office, a bomb was found and defused. The use of C4 high explosive - used by the British military - gives some indication where the bomb may have come from.

For the time being at least, the overall acceptance of the agreement

and Sinn Féin's reformist strategy reflect the class make-up of the Republican movement in favour of the middle class and to the benefit of British imperialism. It has long been Britain's aim to divide the Republican movement. As Brendan Hughes says, 'a central part of British counterinsurgency strategy was to mould leaderships whom they could deal with'. The whole process is yet another attempt to isolate the revolutionaries and draw a section into constitutional politics.

Only the leadership of the nationalist working class can ensure victory in this struggle, in the pursuit of independent working class interests, using whatever means they deem necessary. We argue not for a simple return to armed struggle but rather a new movement which is built upon the political lessons of Sinn Féin's failure.

Meanwhile, outside the government buildings, in the working class areas of Ireland, the real struggle for Irish freedom and justice continues. All democratic and progressive forces in Britain must give this struggle their unconditional support.

PAUL MCKENNA
Strathclyde

Stop in the name of love

Viva the Lesbian Avengers who stopped one of Stagecoach's bus fleet to challenge in the name of love multimillionaire Brian Souter's disgusting campaign in Scotland to oppose the repeal of Thatcher's infamous Section 28.

Section 28 effectively outlaws the discussion at school of homosexual love as equally valid. Those who use their wealth to promote the value of the family and call for the 'protection' of children ignore the proven fact that abuse is overwhelmingly perpetrated by heterosexual males within the family.

The Avengers had the odd can of pink spray paint to redecorate Souter's vehicle, but this is insignificant in contrast to the £500,000 he spent on the pathetic posters which have appeared in Scottish cities and towns. Council-house-born Souter said he was prepared to spend a million to defeat the Section's repeal. That is a million that won't be going to ensure his workers can have the facilities and shifts to let them look after their families. (see FRFI 153 Letters)

Souter claims to be a Christian. The churches in Scotland have united in a reactionary alliance to present a petition to the Scottish Parliament demanding the retention of Section 28. The Catholic church's main man, Cardinal Winning, has

equated gay people with Nazis and spoke of 'abuse of power'. When were the churches and their petitions when Soho was bombed by a murderous fascist brought up to believe this kind of shit? Where are the petitions, where is the campaign against homophobic attacks in the capital city of Edinburgh where one in three gay men have suffered assault?

The Labour-loving Scottish Daily Record was a significant and powerful voice organising the anti-gay stampede. Now this racist rag applauds refugees being 'booted out' - who needs the British National Party?

Opposition to Souter and the bigots has been scattered, disorganised and tame. Lesbian Avengers type actions need to be multiplied a hundred times at least. Stagecoach workers have another reason now to challenge Souter's wealth and power. Labour and its phoney left will not lead this opposition, their silence and timidity in defending their own plans to repeal Section 28 have everything to do with electoral calculation. For all of us the hard lesson will have to be learned painfully: we only have the rights we are prepared to fight for!

MICHAEL MCGREGOR
Dundee

Socialism and education

In FRFI, when it speaks of education, it rightly lauds the achievements of socialist Cuba. But never forget the impressive achievements of Soviet Russia or Communist China. Lenin said his priorities were 'education, education, education' years before Blair nicked the slogan, and literacy in Russia rose from around 10% to nearly 100% by 1950. By the 1970s, the Soviet education system was the most thorough and envied in the world, and higher education was taken by a majority of school leavers. Degrees and diplomas were commonplace even among miners and factory workers and the education system there provided people with essential analytical skills the west does not teach - which is why the people of the USSR were so efficient at criticising its ills in the 1980s.

although the reforms they took backfired and ruined Russia.

In China, education - until the 1970s - had no political content whatsoever, which was quite an achievement. It shows something about Chinese socialism that children did not need to be indoctrinated to love their country and its leaders. Again, illiteracy was combated - and, as in Cuba, prostitution and drug abuse were also eliminated quickly. In addition, most teenagers would spend a month or so working in the country as peasants to learn the skills required and to lead them to respect the peasants and workers. Knowing how to grow food is as essential as knowing the square root of pi. This elimination of intellectual arrogance was very important. Many socialist systems have proved that they can bring education to an undereducated majority - not just Cuba.

BEN CHACKO
RedChacko@cs.com

Victory for Turkish political prisoner

Since you printed the article 'Turkish political prisoner on hunger strike in German prison' (FRFI 153), Ilhan Yelkuvan's protest has ended in victory. The solitary confinement imposed on him by the German 'justice' system was lifted on the 63rd day of Ilhan's hunger strike/death fast. He is now allowed free association with Turkish-speaking prisoners, subject to a review period.

Re: 'Ocalan spared'

I was disappointed, but by no means surprised, that in the last issue of FRFI Trevor Rayne chose to tread carefully around the PKK Central Committee's statement that followed the decision not to hang Ocalan. Having worked so closely with the Kurdish community here in Britain, I can understand why you may not wish to cut yourselves off from them. But to be honest, a good friend is someone who is prepared to tell another the truth. And the fact is that the statement and many others in a similar vein are clearly nonsense.

The decision not to kill Ocalan is correct and welcome. However, his continued participation in the struggles of the Kurdish people is not, as it is clear that he wishes to lead the Kurds into a proposed alliance against their own interests. Where are the examples to suggest that 'the decision is a starting point in achieving the reality of a Turkey constantly striving for the goal of a democratic republic'? Nowhere. Where are the examples of states similar to Turkey being aided by imperialism to move towards democracy? Russia, China, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Iraq, Kuwait, etc. etc.

And what happened to the historic

needs of the Kurdish people for self-determination and a homeland? Apparently, the conflict was 'a historic mistake'. So what does this mean for those who fought and died? Will Ocalan, who inspired those who revolted, apologise to the relatives of those who died?

I am confident that the Kurds will reject Ocalan, as their objective circumstances will mean they either fight or continue to be displaced and butchered. The Ilisu Dam indicates what imperialism has in mind for the Kurds.

Here in Britain, I have been an active supporter of the struggles by the Kurdish people since becoming secretary of the Kurdish Refugees Support Group when 5,500 arrived in east London between April and the end of May 1989. I have been a supporter of the Kurdish Solidarity Committee (KSC) since its inception, and have spoken on their platforms on many occasions. I wrote to the KSC late last year, offering to put in writing for circulation my views. Since then, 'total silence'. Clearly democratic debate is something no longer welcomed in the KSC. Perhaps by printing this letter you can encourage them to change their actions and attitudes.

MARK METCALF
East London

Thanks

Many thanks for the recent edition of your paper, a bright light in a very dark tunnel. When one is surrounded by lies, deceit and corruption on a daily basis, to read what is really

happening in the world gives one the strength to keep on fighting. I am sure I speak for many when I say keep up the good work.

ANDREW NUTTALL
HMP Frankland

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

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Lies, bullying, threats: Labour's class-ridden education policy

The £19 billion con trick

Close scrutiny and careful research by two investigative journalists published in *The Guardian* have exposed the Labour government's lies about education expenditure. Nick Davies and Helen Mulholland show that the 'spending bonanza' of an extra £19 billion announced for funding for classrooms is an elaborate con trick. The existing budget for UK education for 1998/9 was £38.3 billion. On 14 July 1998 Education Minister David Blunkett announced that this would rise in 1999 by £3bn, in 2000 by £3.5bn, and finally, in 2001/2, by £3.2bn. This, of course, adds up to £9.7bn - none of which has effectively reached the classrooms that need it. Where is the rest of the £19bn? The answer is that it does not exist. Contrary to the government's description of the £19 bn as 'real', nearly half of it is manufactured by the simple book-keeping trick of counting the annual increases three times and adding them altogether.

In one way none of this matters. This is a government that has used 'announcements' and 'presentations' set up by its 'spin doctors' so often that they are ignored and regarded as background noise like muzak in a supermarket. The credibility gap

which spent less in its first two years on education than the Tories did in their last two years, is making schools even more disagreeable to many young people.

Schools are losing their playing fields. Despite the pre-election pledge to stop the selling-off of sports pitches, the Department for Education under Blunkett has approved the sale of 101 of a proposed 103 playing fields. More than 100 school playing fields have gone in the past 15 months alone.

Class sizes have risen. While average classes in the private schools are 10 pupils, the numbers of children per class are rising rapidly in state schools leading to overcrowding and lack of support. When Blair promised that his priority in government would be 'education, education, education' he was responding to a crisis in infant school sizes that was affecting parents across even the Tory heartlands. By 1999 the prime minister was proudly claiming 100,000 more infants in classes under 30. What he has not said is that children in every other age group, nursery, junior and secondary are being taught in classes even more overcrowded than when Labour came to power. The number of children in classes of over 40 has doubled in three years while the number of secondary classes of more than 30 is the worst for 14 years.

The increasing competition between schools in the annual League Tables of GCSE passes is matched by increasing competition within schools. 'Excellence for All' is more than an empty slogan for the 50% of children who left without five or more C level GCSEs after years of boredom, of testing, of being labelled a failure. The highly centralised authoritarian and limited National Curriculum turns mainstream schools into a wilderness of alienation for many children who need a curriculum supportive of their needs. Instead they are abandoned to sink or swim in a quasi-adult world of training and vocational qualifications, all wrapped up in the language and ideology of the free market. Less academic pupils are often launched upon 'Leisure and Tourism' courses, usually subsidised with materials from McDonald's and Pizza Hut. This is actually a sad denial of the need for a fulfilling and relevant education.

Bullied and threatened teachers do not make for supportive, responsive teachers. Blunkett and the Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead regularly attack teachers, schools, parents and children, publicly and abusively comparing them to the private sector. 'Few other businesses are marketed by managers who publicly denounce their product, attack their staff, savage their local managers, and sing the praises of the competition.' (Davies, *The Guardian* 8 March 2000)

The fashion for threatening the workforce was evident in the first public statement by Professor Tim Brighouse, Chair of Islington Council's new Education Commission which will oversee the privatisation



Ripon Grammar School - the playing field is not for sale

process of local schooling. Teachers were warned: 'We'll exhaust you for better schools'. Tough Brighouse also declared that he will not tolerate poverty as an excuse for poor exam results. This tolerance of poverty, but not as an excuse, is parroted from his masters. At the end of February Blunkett himself declared that 'Poverty is no excuse' for educational failure. He threatened that up to 70 secondary schools with the worst GCSE records, face closure. They would be reopened as Fresh Start Schools with £1million for refurbishment, new staff and £100,000 super-heads. This was, of course, the

re-announcement of a previous statement about failing schools and failing teachers.

Labour will not ever admit the fact that educational inequality is inevitable in a class system based on privilege and oppression. They still pretend they can magic working class failure out of the system by a mixture of whizzkiddy and technocratic manipulation.

Even OFSTED inspectors know better. A recent report on schools in deprived areas said they need more money and more realistic targets. Only 10 such schools in the whole country got GCSE results anywhere

near the national average.

It is nonsense to claim, as Labour does, that success is only a matter of high expectations and hard work and that failure is down to incompetent teachers. After 'naming and shaming' and 'special measures', the Fresh Start programme was supposed to be the answer. Within weeks of Blunkett's tough call, three out of the ten 'superheads' called to save 'failing schools' after being given their own 'fresh start' had already thrown in the towel and resigned.

One of these schools, East Brighton College of Media Arts, re-opened in September. 'Superhead' Tony Greenwood has resigned after less than two terms during which 10 staff left and 58 different supply teachers had to be drafted in. One teacher said the 'fresh start' was 'a hundred times worse than last year'.

When Carol McAlpine took over as 'superhead' of Firfield Community School in a working class district of Newcastle, she sacked most of the staff and resorted to paying cash to students for turning up. It didn't improve matters and Ms McAlpine has since resigned.

The third 'superhead', Terence Friedag has given up on the old George Orwell School in Islington. The school was given a £1 million facelift when it re-opened 18 months ago and re-named The Islington Arts and Media School. Only six of the former staff were re-employed and Friedag was given scope to enrich the lives of the working class students with the delights of German-style vocational education. Within weeks of opening a riot broke out at the school sparked by a row over a bag of chips. The police were called in and rumour has it, found 'superhead' Friedag hiding under his desk.

This is not just a criticism of the headteachers concerned. Labour is to blame for perpetuating the myth that educational development is all about management; that the social and economic relations embedded within the system count for nothing. Labour has no intention of providing decent education for working class children because it would take social and economic revolution to do so. They only want to keep the working class in its place to provide a compliant and flexible work force.

A recent report from York University showed that Local Education Authorities with fully comprehensive systems add more educational value than those with grammar schools. Wouldn't it make sense then, if you really intended to raise educational standards, to tackle the selective system? But Labour will not challenge the independent and grammar school elite, for these are the privileged halls of their middle class constituency. Blunkett explained away his pre-election promise to end selection by saying it was 'a joke'. Nothing could better illustrate the hypocrisy of Labour's education policy - a web of tricks and deceptions spun in the vain hope of obscuring the class inequalities of the capitalist system.

Jim Craven and Susan Davidson



Chris Woodhead, Schools Chief Inspector

between people's experiences of life's hardships and the Blairite blather of the Government has grown. Lying, repetition of the same spending promises and sound-bite policies do not alter the fact that the poor are getting poorer and that their schools, hospitals and public services are getting more impoverished.

The agenda of this government is to attack and control the poor. In November 1999 School Standards Minister Estelle Morris announced a £35m plan to 'help problem pupils and combat truancy'. In March 2000 Home Secretary Jack Straw introduced a new crime bill threatening parents with a £2,500 fine or prison for up to three months for failing to make their truanting children attend school. Last year one million children had unauthorised absence at some stage and 50,000 pupils play truant every school day.

Small wonder when schools in poor areas face difficulties that make them unpleasant and harsh environments. This Labour government,



Education Minister, David Blunkett